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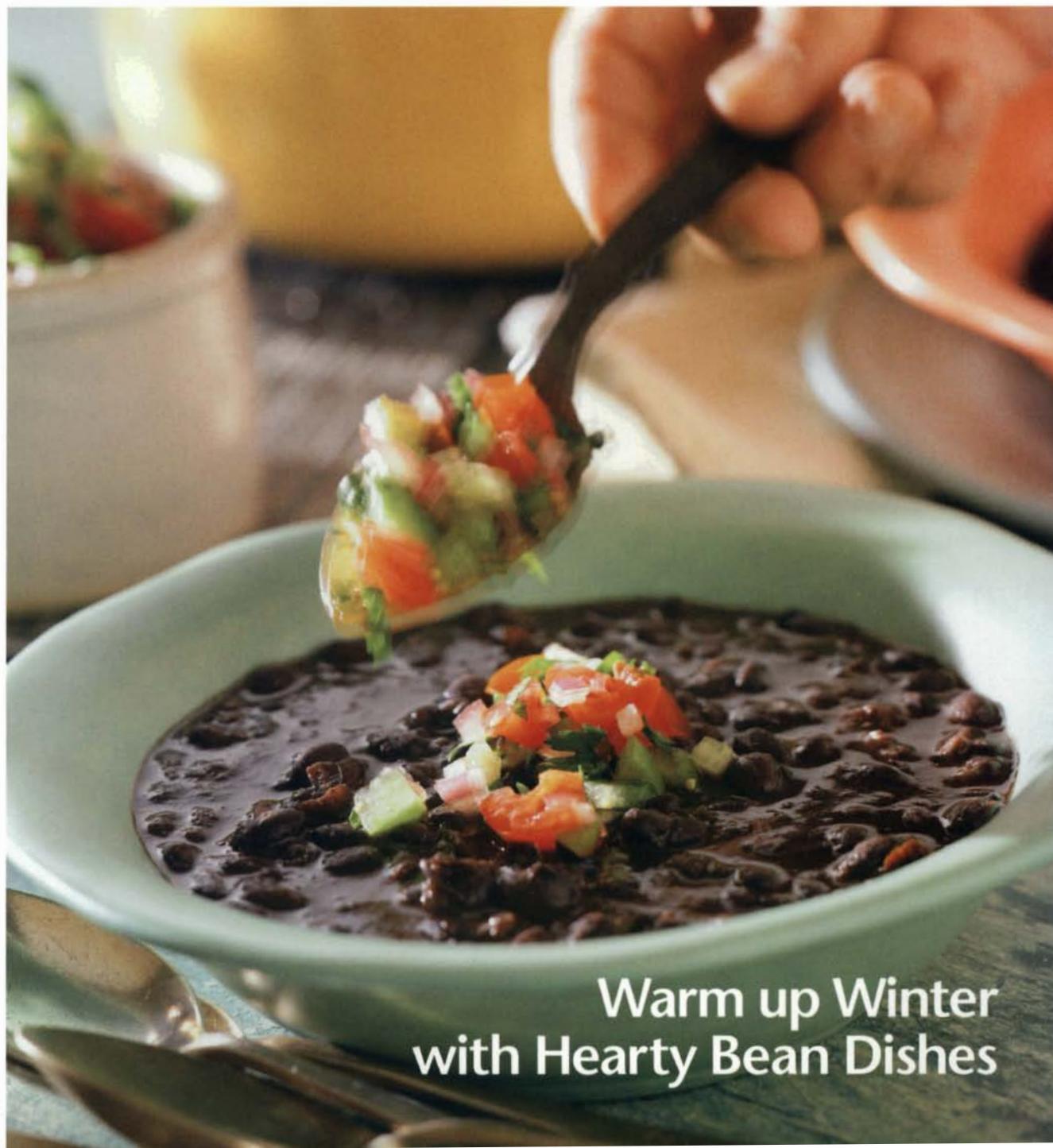
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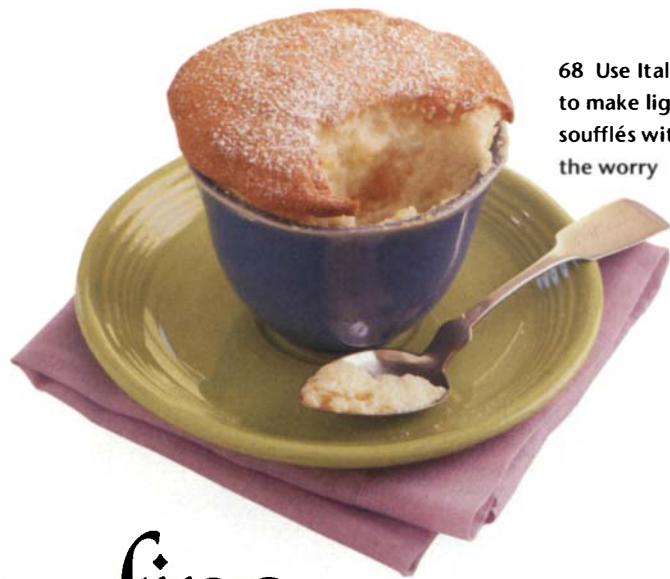
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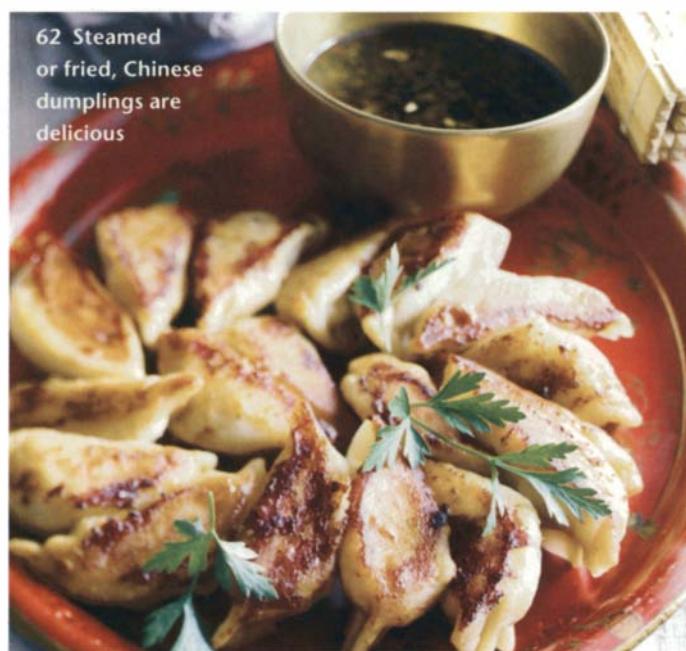
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*On the cover:* Black Bean Soup with Tomato-Tomatillo Salsa, "Simmer a Pot of Beans for Good, Hearty Fare," p. 32.

Cover photo, Laurie Smith. Opposite page: top left, Ellen Silverman; bottom, Richard Felber. This page: above and below, Alan Richardson.



If you'd like to share your thoughts on topics like genetically engineered tomatoes, our most recent baking article, or your food and cooking philosophies, here's the place to do so.

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## Love the bread— are you on the Web?

Love your magazine; I've just been looking at *Fine Cooking* #16. I made it as far as the rosemary flatbread article (p. 46), but no farther, due to the fact that I was compelled to stop and make the bread. It's excellent.

I was wondering, as you have an Internet address, do you have a Web page?

—George A. Jager  
(via e-mail)

**Editors' reply:** Thanks for the kind words. We're happy to say that we do have a Web site now. Visit us, and all the Taunton magazines, at [www.taunton.com](http://www.taunton.com).

## The thorny issue of handling artichokes

Generally I love your magazine, but when I read "How to Handle Artichokes" by Georgeanne Brennan (*Fine*



*Cooking* #14, p. 36), I began to question whether your magazine actually knows anything about fine cooking.

Never, ever, ever, cut the stem off an artichoke, as your article recommends. You must roll the artichoke with one hand, pressing on the stem with the heel of the other hand until the stem comes out. That way those nasty, coarse, tough strings come out of the bottom of the heart with the stem. If you just cut

the stem off, the strings end up in your guests' teeth.

—Edward McCabe,  
New York, NY

## Georgeanne Brennan replies:

I've heard of this method but never practice it because I truly don't find it necessary. I cut the stems and pare off the outer layer from the base of the artichoke. I wonder if your method is a holdover from the days when mature, tough artichokes were common. Now, even many large artichokes are tender and the bottoms and stems are prized for their flavor and texture. In French and Italian markets, artichokes with foot-long stems still attached are sold at a premium.

## Quicker tamales

I'd like to offer a faster method for making tamale dough than the one described in your article "A New Twist on Tamales" (*Fine Cooking* #17, p. 52). The recipe I use is from *The Feast of Santa Fe*, by Huntley Dent (Fireside, 1993). This method produces a fine tamale using the food processor, and it gives you more time for filling and wrapping more tamales.

For the dough: 1 1/2 cups *masa harina*, 6 tablespoons lard or vegetable shortening, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking powder, 1 cup lukewarm broth.

The method: put all the ingredients but the broth in a food processor; process until mixed, about 10 seconds. With the motor on, pour in the broth and process a few seconds until the dough is stiff enough to spread, rather like a buttercream icing. If the dough gets too stiff later, beat in hot water, a tablespoon at a time.

—Bonnie Russell,  
Stillwater, OK ♦

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*Deveining shrimp makes it look and taste better.*

tract. In very small shrimp, this vein is almost imperceptible and is generally left in. But for medium and large shrimp, the vein is unattractive against the clean white meat and adds a gritty,

## Why devein shrimp?

*Is deveining shrimp necessary?*

—Jan Darbhamulla, Newark, CA

**Molly Stevens replies:** Deveining shrimp is more of an aesthetic choice than a necessity. While there's no harm in eating cooked shrimp that haven't been deveined, most people prefer cleaned shrimp. The black line that runs down the back of each shrimp, sometimes referred to as the "sand vein," is the intestinal

muddy taste. Deveining is simple enough to do either before cooking or after. I think it's worth the few extra minutes of work.

**Molly Stevens** is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking*.

## Preventing homemade breads from cracking

*My breads crack open severely in the final 15 minutes of baking (total baking time is 30 minutes). Is this related to too much or too little rising time? I heat the oven to 500°F and lower it to 425°. The breads are baked on a hearthstone, with water in a pan at the bottom of the oven.*

—Betti Weiss, Manhattan, KS

**Noel Comess replies:** "Bursting," as it's called in the business, can be caused by a number of factors.

Insufficient rising time is the most common culprit. To test your dough's rise, give it a good, deep poke. (Don't worry: the indentation will disappear in the oven.) If the indentation springs back quickly, nervous and anxious to please, your bread dough isn't ready to be baked, and it will burst in the oven. This is because the gluten hasn't

been sufficiently stretched by the growing volume of gas that occurs during the rising process.

If the indentation just sits there, the bread has risen too long. Bake it anyway. The bread will still taste good: it just won't look like the masterpiece you'd first envisioned. If the indentation comes back slowly but deliberately, like a cat taking its time stretching before acknowledging you, your dough is perfect.

Another cause of bursting may be that the dough has skinned over during shaping or rising. Here, the dough hasn't been properly protected from air currents. Its surface dries out, forming a sort of straitjacket around the loaf. This prevents the loaf from rising properly, and it also causes bursting once the dough is put in the oven. To avoid this common problem, be sure that your bread dough is worked and left to rise in a place that's draft-free and sufficiently humid.

Last, the seam formed when the dough is rolled closed may not be properly sealed. Be sure to apply plenty of pressure with the heel of your hand to ensure that the seam is well closed. When setting the bread on the stone

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# Q&A

or in the pan to bake, be sure to position its seam dead center at the bottom.

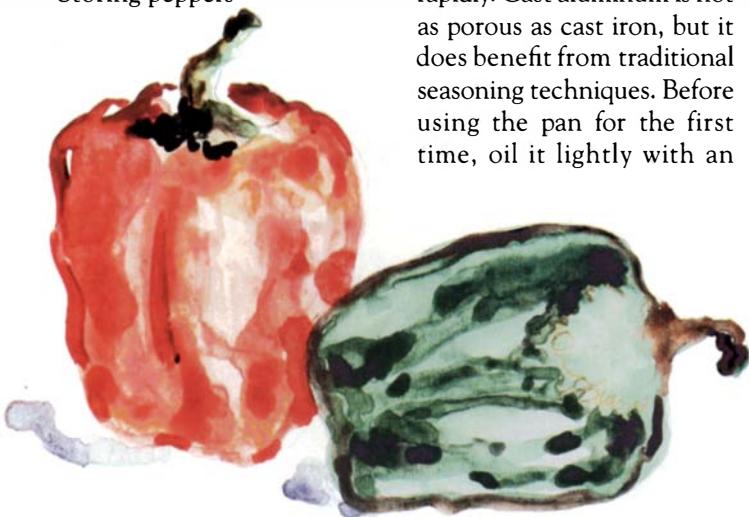
*Noel Comess owns Tom Cat Bakery in Long Island City, New York.*

## How long do roasted bell peppers keep?

*I like to roast large batches of bell peppers and store them in oil for long-term use. I've kept them for up to two weeks in the refrigerator, tightly covered. How long can I keep them in the refrigerator, and must they be completely immersed in oil? Is there a way to preserve roasted peppers without refrigeration?*

—Mary McNulty,  
Freising, Germany

**Paul Bertolli replies:** I've found that roasted peppers will keep for up to three weeks or more if immersed in oil and refrigerated; generally, I add some vinegar and salt, which seems to protect them from spoiling. It's unsafe, though, to assume this as a general rule. Peppers are a low-acid food; the apparent absence of air due to the oil layer on top offers no assurance that bacteria could not enter the food just the same. Storing peppers



*Roast bell peppers in small batches and use them quickly.*

under oil at room temperature or warmer dramatically increases the possibility of spoilage. The only safe method of long term preservation is pressure canning, which, of course, alters the quality of the roasted peppers. The best and most reliable advice I can give is to make small batches, continue to store them as you have been, in the refrigerator, and enjoy them as soon after you've prepared them as possible.

*Paul Bertolli is the chef and co-owner of Oliveto restaurant in Oakland, California, and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*

## Seasoning a cast-aluminum griddle

*I love grilling hamburgers on my cast-aluminum stovetop griddle, but when I tried seasoning it, a sticky mess ensued. What's the proper technique for seasoning such a pan?*

—Osnat Teitelbaum,  
Gainesville, FL

**Karen Deutsch replies:** Cast-aluminum stovetop griddles and grills are recent arrivals on the market. They're lighter than the classic cast iron, and conduct heat more rapidly. Cast aluminum is not as porous as cast iron, but it does benefit from traditional seasoning techniques. Before using the pan for the first time, oil it lightly with an

odorless vegetable oil and put it in a moderately hot oven (350° to 375°F) for 30 to 45 minutes (if you can do this twice, it's even better). When you're ready to grill, set the grill pan over the burners, coat it with a thin layer of oil, and warm it up over high heat. If you're grilling meat, rub the meat with a light coating of oil, too.

The reason for your sticky mess may be that liquids or sugars clung to the cast aluminum. Certain foods, like onions, release sugars as they cook, which will subsequently caramelize and burn (sweet barbecue sauces and glazes also do this). To clean the pan, use a metal grill brush, or a damp cloth with some kosher salt. Don't soak the pan in water. If you must use soap and water to clean the pan, dry the pan completely in a warm oven afterwards. Then coat it with a thin layer of oil and put it back in the oven for 30 minutes for additional seasoning.

*Karen Deutsch is associate buyer for Lamalle Kitchenware in New York City.*

## The shelf life of rice vinegar

*I have a bottle of rice vinegar that has been open for a few years. Recently, I've noticed round, mushy white disks growing in the vinegar. The disks are the same diameter as the bottle. What's causing this? Is the vinegar safe to use, or should I throw it out?*

—Lillian Williams,  
Baltimore, MD

**Ken Hom replies:** The round, mushy, white disks growing in the vinegar are caused by bacteria that attack the alcohol in the rice wine and convert it to acetic acid. Because the bacteria require oxygen, they



*Rice vinegar, made from rice wine, will keep for six to nine months.*

grow on the surface of the vinegar, sticking together to form a skin in a disk shape. This bacteria is usually known as the vinegar plant or the "mother" of the vinegar and may be used as a starter for a new batch of homemade vinegar. Although the vinegar is safe to use, it sounds like you haven't used it for a while. Rice vinegars are low in acid, and these acids are volatile ones that evaporate within six to nine months, causing the opened bottle of vinegar to lose its strength and flavor. Fortunately, rice vinegar is inexpensive, so I'd suggest buying a fresh bottle. *Ken Hom is the author of Ken Hom's Chinese Kitchen (Hyperion, 1994) and Ken Hom's Asian Ingredients (Ten Speed Press, 1996).* ♦

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# Savory Greens for Cooking



*Spinach is versatile, popular, quick cooking, and available in all but the hottest months. The stems are usually discarded, but the crowns—the root end with a few inches of stems—are good eating when steamed and dressed with butter or olive oil.*



*Beet greens look tough but cook to tenderness in just a few minutes. Use them in place of spinach, especially for fillings, keeping in mind that the red stems will bleed like beets. Also steam or sauté beet greens with butter and lemon or garlic.*



*Red or green Swiss chard is valued for its leaves and stems. Mild tasting and tender, the leaves can be blanched and used for stuffing. The stems can be sliced and braised or baked into gratins.*



*Kale, a hearty winter green, is distinguished by its blue-green ruffled leaves. Discard the woody stems and steam the leaves or shred them and stir into soups.*

At the end of winter, when spring is just around the corner, I start to crave leafy greens. I wind up cooking them several times a week—and the stronger tasting they are, the better I like them.

I know I'm not alone in this passion. I see plenty of shoppers piling bunches of greens into their market carts as winter comes to an end. It must be nature's doing, turning our tastes toward sweet and pungent greens just around the time we need them.

## GREENS ARE COOL-SEASON VEGETABLES

Because greens don't tolerate

summer's heat (they go to seed, becoming bitter and inedible), buy them during the cool months of fall, winter, and early spring when they're more tender and flavorful. In the market, look for greens that are bouncy and vibrant, fairly gleaming with greenness (or whatever color is appropriate). Size isn't important, but vitality is. Limp, yellow leaves or slimy signs of decay are big turnoffs.

If you can't use your robust greens right away, refrigerate them in perforated plastic bags so that they won't sweat or wilt. Wash them just before using, as drops of moisture

hasten spoilage. To thoroughly clean dirty greens, separate bunches into individual leaves and soak the leaves in a deep bowl of water for a few minutes, stirring the leaves once or twice with your hands to loosen grit. Carefully lift the leaves out of the water: the grit will sink to the bottom of the bowl. Discard the water and grit, rinse the bowl, and repeat this process until no more grit falls from the leaves.

(Continued on p. 14)



*Red Russian kale is less hearty than its more familiar cousin and has frilly purple-veined leaves. Sauté or steam and serve with pasta.*

## Top Chefs In Training



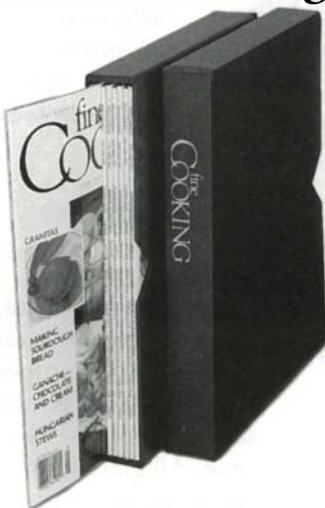
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# AT THE MARKET



*Collard greens* have large, fleshy, round, sage-colored leaves that require plenty of cooking time—at least 15 to 20 minutes. Mildly peppery, collards like a dash of pepper sauce, red pepper flakes, and garlic, or toasted sesame oil and sesame seeds.



*Mustard greens* are hot and peppery tasting and can be yellowish green or reddish purple in color. Remove the stems and simmer or steam the leaves until completely tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Season with vinegar or pepper sauce.



*Broccoli raab* has a unique flavor: pungent yet appealing. Similar to Chinese flowering broccoli, these greens have edible stems and small, broccoli-like florets. Raab is best parboiled for 5 minutes, then drained, chopped, sautéed with garlic and red pepper flakes, and combined with pasta.



*Turnip greens* can be prickly to the touch and have a distinct, peppery taste when cooked. They can be slow-cooked, southern style, or steamed until tender, like mustard greens.



*Dandelion greens* are strong and bitter tasting, so eat this spring green when it's very young, before it gets too bitter. Combine with other strong flavors such as mustard, Gruyère cheese, or hot bacon dressing.

## TENDER GREENS COOK QUICKLY; TOUGHER ONES NEED MORE TIME

Greens can be loosely grouped into two categories: tender/sweet and tough/bitter. Tender, mild greens include red and green Swiss chard, spinach, and beet greens—all *Chenopodiums*, or members of the goosefoot family. These tender greens can be cooked merely with the water that clings to their leaves after washing, quickly wilted in a hot pan, or stirred into soups just before serving.

The tougher, more aggressively flavored greens include broccoli raab, turnip, mustard, and dandelion greens. Kale and collards, while not particularly strong tasting, can be in-

cluded in this group because their fibrous texture requires long cooking. Stronger greens are usually boiled in a pot of water for extended periods. Unfortunately, when cooked this way, many nutrients go down the drain, unless the greens are cooked southern style, to the point where the liquid is greatly reduced and that “pot likker” is mopped up with hot cornbread.

The most efficient way to cook strong greens is to steam them: simply simmer the leaves in a few cups of water in a covered pan. The steam reduces their volume and softens the greens. Tough greens will be tender in anywhere from 5 to 25 minutes, depending on the variety.

## BOOST GREENS WITH BOLD FLAVORS

Cook tender, sweet greens in butter or olive oil and season them with garlic, mint, parsley, marjoram, cream, and cheese, such as Gruyère and fontina. The more aggressive greens, whose flavors remain clear, are always flattered with garlic and red pepper flakes, oils and bacon fat, but not butter or cream. Once you’ve

steamed tougher greens, they can be sautéed or drained, chopped, and incorporated into fillings or gratins, or directly dressed for the dinner table. All greens, especially the strong ones, are miraculously sweetened with the addition of a little vinegar or lemon juice.

---

Deborah Madison, the author of *The Vegetarian Table: America* (Chronicle, 1996), lives, writes, and cooks greens in Santa Fe, New Mexico. ♦



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**FACT:**

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## Citrus flavor in a bottle

I can easily get fresh lemons year round from the trees in my back yard, but zesting the fruits to use in baking is still a chore I don't enjoy.

I recently tried Boyajian citrus oils—lemon, lime and orange—which can replace zest in many recipes. No more scraping your knuckles on the grater, and no more bitter pith in with your zest. According to Boyajian, the less the oils are cooked the more flavor they'll have. This makes them perfect additions to buttercreams, glazes, and vinaigrettes. But I use zest the most in baking, so that's how I tested the oils.

**The oils provide a mild but authentic flavor to baked goods.** You can't beat the convenience of these oils, and used in the right proportion, they offer a good citrus flavor. My only complaint was that I had to use a little more oil than the company suggests to get good flavor in baked items. When baking scones, I found that  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of lemon oil (the equivalent of one zested lemon, according to Boyajian) was completely lost in my first batch, whereas  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons gave a nice citrus flavor to the next batch. A full tablespoon of orange oil in my brownies added a wonderful orange flavor that developed even after the brownies had cooled.

Look for these oils, and Boyajian's newest flavors (cinnamon, clove, anise, and three different mints), in gourmet



*Boyajian citrus oils can replace zest in many recipes.*

stores, or order from King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue (800/827-6836) or Williams-Sonoma (800/541-2233). Carole Bloom, of San Diego, is the author of *The International Dictionary of Desserts, Pastries & Confections* (Hearst, 1995).

## Heavy-duty mixer handles lots of dough

Several years ago, I decided to get a stand mixer, especially to use for kneading bread dough. After several disappointing purchases, my friends convinced me to try the Magic Mill DLX, made by Electrolux, the vacuum makers. Now that I've got the Magic Mill, I only wish I'd bought it sooner. With its 450-watt motor and 23-cup capacity, it not only kneads bread dough, but it can also mix



*The Magic Mill has a 23-cup capacity and a 450-watt motor.*

everything from cake batter to pasta dough.

**The Magic Mill mimics kneading by hand with its heavy roller and scraper.** With a rhythmic motion, the scraper turns and folds the dough while the roller pushes and beats it. It also has a standard dough hook, but I love the doughs I've made with the roller and scraper. Large and small bread doughs come out smooth and elastic, with all ingredients well distributed. In my side-by-side tests with other mixers, breads made in the Magic Mill baked up higher and lighter with a finer crumb. And clean-up is a breeze.

At \$499, the Magic Mill is not cheap. But I'm so sure this will be my last mixer that it's worth it to me. It comes with a three-year warranty, and many attachments are available, including a blender, a grain and coffee mill, a citrus juicer, and a meat grinder. To order, call Magic Mill in Monsey, New York, 914/368-2532. Judy Monroe is a food and health writer based in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has co-written three cookbooks.

## Bags to keep vegetables fresh longer

Although I work as a produce buyer for a large food market, when I shop for myself, I always buy more fruits and vegetables than I can possibly use. The Evert-Fresh Corporation, with its vegetable storage bags, proposes to help me.

According to the company, the polyethylene bags are impregnated with oya, a natural

mineral that absorbs ethylene gas, the stuff that accelerates the deterioration of produce.

I tested the Evert-Fresh bags, which come in three sizes, on cauliflower, broccoli, and carrots. My control was the same kinds of vegetables left in the plastic bags from the grocery store. After three weeks, there was no doubt that the grocery-bagged vege-



*Evert-Fresh bags extend the life of your fruits and vegetables.*

tables were inedible. Those in the Evert-Fresh bags were doing much better. They weren't dried out, their color was good, and the carrots weren't rubbery. They even tasted good; apparently, this is because the bags also "breathe," allowing the damaging gases to be released. An antifogging treatment minimizes moisture on the inside of the bag and inhibits bacterial growth.

So while these bags may not save me from my overindulgences, they're worth a try if you don't go through produce quickly. The reusable bags start at \$2.50 for ten and are sold in the produce section of many grocery stores. For more information, call 800/822-8141.

Kristi Johnson is the director of buying perishables at Sutton Place Gourmet/Hay Day, a large specialty-food retailer. ♦

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## Pork Tenderloin with White Balsamic Vinegar

1 1/2-2 lb. pork tenderloin  
1 cup flour  
3 tbsp. butter  
2 tbsp. cracked peppercorns  
4 oz. Alessi White Balsamic Vinegar  
1 pkg. Alessi Dried Funghi Porcini  
Mushrooms  
8 oz. heavy cream

Reconstitute mushrooms in 2 oz. water and 2 oz. balsamic vinegar. Strain liquid through paper towel or coffee filter; retain. Salt pork, then dust in flour and roll in peppercorns to evenly coat. Sear pork in 2 tbsp. butter. Bake in oven uncovered at 400° on rack with pan to catch drippings. Cook for 25 minutes or until done. Cut in 1 1/2" slices. In the saucépan used to sear pork, stir fry reconstituted mushrooms in 1 tbsp. butter and drippings from cooked pork for 30 seconds. Add cream, 2 oz. Alessi White Balsamic Vinegar and strained liquid used for the mushrooms. Stir until thickened (approximately 3 minutes). Serve pork along side of broad egg noodles. Top both with sauce. Serves 4.

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*Homemade stock adds a rich, deep flavor to risotto, soups, stews, and sauces. Freeze it in amounts you often need.*

## Simple Steps to Making Versatile Chicken Stock

**M**any people don't make their own chicken stock because they think it's a difficult endeavor that takes a lot of time. The truth is that it isn't and it doesn't.

You can assemble the ingredients for a chicken stock in about 15 minutes. Then, except for skimming occasionally as the stock simmers, you can forget all about it—at least until you use it as a soup base or to make risotto and you taste the huge difference between homemade stock and store-bought.

**Brown stock vs. white stock.** There are two types of chicken stock: white stock, made by simmering

chicken pieces, aromatic vegetables, and herbs in a large pot of water; and brown stock, made by browning the chicken and vegetables before adding the water. I usually prefer the deeper, more intense flavor of a brown stock, which is what I'm making here. But if I'm cooking a pale, delicately flavored soup, I'll opt for white stock. To make a white stock, follow the same steps described here, but don't brown the ingredients.

### ALL YOU REALLY NEED IS THE CHICKEN

Many cookbooks offer very specific lists of ingredients for making stock, but the truth is that stock recipes are really quite flexible.

My master recipe suggests particular herbs and vegetables, but you can play with different combinations to suit your needs. You can even make stock without herbs and vegetables. It won't be as tasty, but if you're using the stock as a base for a soup or sauce, you can add flavor down the road.

### A FEW TRICKS FOR CLEAR STOCK

Cooks are often disappointed by stock that ends up cloudy. Cloudy stock tastes just fine and makes little difference if you're using it in, say, a cream soup. But if you want perfectly clear chicken noodle soup, you'll need a clear stock. Here are a few tricks:

◆ **Make a brown stock.** Insoluble fat and proteins can cloud

**For rich flavor, brown the chicken and include its juices in the stock**



*Spread the chicken and vegetables in a single layer in a roasting pan. Roast in a 475°F oven until the browned juices cling to the bottom of the pan, about 45 minutes. Remove the chicken and vegetables and spoon off the fat.*



*Deglaze the roasting pan to capture all the flavorful juices. With the pan over medium heat, pour in 2 cups of water and scrape up the caramelized juices—those brown bits.*



*Put the chicken, vegetables, and juices in a 6-quart pot and add cold water to just cover. Too much water will make a weak stock; a good rule is 1 pound of solids to 1 pint of liquid.*

## For clear stock, simmer, skim, and strain



**Add the herbs in a bouquet garni.** Tying them together or bundling them in cheesecloth makes them easy to remove and keeps them from clouding the stock.



**Bring to a simmer and then cook gently for 1½ hours, skimming occasionally with a ladle or spoon. Don't let the stock come to a rapid boil.**



**Strain the broth into clean containers.** To remove any particles you missed during skimming, pour the stock through a strainer lined with a triple layer of cheesecloth.

your stock. Browning causes the proteins in the chicken to coagulate before they come in contact with the water so they won't cloud the stock.

If you're making more than a couple of quarts of stock, brown the chicken pieces (and any aromatic vegetables) in a roasting pan in the oven. For smaller amounts, the bones and meat can be browned right in the stockpot on the stove before the water is added.

◆ **For a white stock, include more meat in the pot.** Unlike a brown stock, a white stock made with just bones will always be cloudy. To prevent this, use equal amounts of meat and bones. As the meat cooks, it slowly releases proteins, which coagulate and trap the minute particles that cloud the stock, making them easy to skim off. Meat also adds more flavor to both white and brown stocks.

◆ **Don't let your stock boil.** The particles that should float to the top will be churned back into the broth

by a hard boil, making the stock cloudy.

◆ **Skim off fat and scum.** If you're going to use your stock right away, be diligent about skimming it. If you have time to chill the stock, however, the fat and any remaining scum will solidify on the surface, making it very easy to remove.

◆ **Strain the stock well.** If the stock still has any particles you missed during skimming, strain it through a triple layer of cheesecloth.

### STOCK UP ON STOCK

It takes as much time and effort to make two quarts of stock as it does to make two gallons, so I always make a large batch.

**Cooling the stock in stages is most efficient** and keeps the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer from being lowered by hot stock. Before freezing, allow the stock to come to room temperature, using an ice bath for large quantities, and then refrigerate it until cool before putting it in the freezer. It will

last for months once frozen.

Freeze stock in quantities you'll likely need. Don't freeze it in gallon containers or you'll have to defrost the whole thing even if you're only making a small pot of soup.

You can also refrigerate stock for up to five days. After that, if you want to keep it longer, simmer the stock for

ten minutes to kill any bacteria, let it cool, and then refrigerate it for another five days. You can repeat this process, if necessary.

### Chicken Stock

You can adjust this master recipe to suit your own needs by substituting different herbs and vegetables. If you double or triple the recipe, don't forget to increase the size of your *bouquet garni* accordingly. Yields 2 quarts.

4 lb. chicken pieces (backs, bones, necks, drumsticks, wings)  
1 large onion, unpeeled, rinsed and cut into quarters  
1 large carrot, cut into about 8 slices  
1 rib celery, cut into quarters  
1 bouquet garni containing a bunch of parsley, a bay leaf, and 5 sprigs of fresh thyme or 1 tsp. dried thyme

For the procedure, follow the photos starting on p. 18.

### Cool the stock to get all the fat



**Fat is easy to remove from cooled stock.** As the liquid cools, the fat will form a layer on the surface that you can remove with a spoon or a ladle.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, is the author of *Splendid Soups* (Bantam, 1993). His new book, *Fish & Shellfish* (Morrow, 1996), is in bookstores now. ♦

# Choosing Durable, Great-Looking Kitchen Counters



Countertops are a kitchen's single most dominant feature. A wealth of counter space can make kitchen work fun, while not enough leads to stressful juggling of appliances and ingredients when it's time to work.

Counter surface choices vary widely both in cost and in looks. They're generally priced by the foot. As a rough guide to estimating costs, a continu-

need finishing with another strip of laminate or a contrasting material, like wood. You'll see a hairline seam where laminate sheets join up. Laminate's main drawback is that if you damage it, you'll have to replace the entire surface. Also, you're limited when installing a sink to an "overmount," where the edge of the sink sits on top of, and hides, the cut edge of the laminate.

Base your decision on price, beauty, and resistance to wear and tear.

ous 6-foot-long, 2-foot-deep counter with an 18-inch backsplash requires 12 linear feet of material. See the chart opposite for price ranges.

Beyond price and aesthetics, durability—resistance to heat and stains—is an important factor to consider in your decision making.

## MATERIALS VARY FROM SYNTHETICS TO STONE

Though counters are important, they're also one of the places you can cut costs when redesigning your kitchen.

**Laminate** is the most popular choice for kitchen countertops—and the least expensive. They come in hundreds of colors and need no special care. Laminates are made of resin-soaked papers pressed together to create a thin veneer on a fibrous base. They're not solid all the way through, so countertop edges

Formica and Wilsonart are the main manufacturers.

**Solid surfaces** have color running evenly throughout so you can repair minor burn marks and scratches by rubbing with steel wool or fine-grit sandpaper, as long as the finish is matte. Nonporous and stain-resistant, solid surfacing is made of resins, polyesters, acrylics, or a combination. The stuff is costly, and color choices are more limited than with laminate, but a solid-surface countertop is sturdier than any other. The main brands are Avonite, Corian, Gibraltar, and Surell.

**Granite** is the most sensible choice if you want the handsome appearance of stone in your kitchen; it's sturdy, heatproof, elegant, and resists staining when well-sealed. Marble is beautiful, but it's far too porous for kitchen counters.

Granite costs only about 10% more than solid surfacing. It's visually commanding, so you might want to install some in selected areas of your kitchen (if you like making pastry, at least one granite surface is great). Granite must be rubbed with a special sealer about once a year.

**Butcher block, a hard maple surface,** is the most popular choice for wooden counters. Wood offers warmth and charm, and butcher block is the only surface on which you can cut directly without damaging it or your knives.

Wood scorches and stains easily, and it expands and contracts. To avoid traps for dirt and bacteria, don't let it abut other materials or position it next to the sink. Butcher block needs a mineral oil rubdown every three or four months to prevent drying and cracking. Never coat it with polyurethane.

**Ceramic tile offers infinite design options,** and



***Mix and match surfaces.** Here, inexpensive ceramic tile lines the utilitarian dish zone, while more pricey and elegant granite covers the island, which can serve as a pastry work station or even a pretty place to serve a buffet.*

it's a great choice for backsplashes. I always suggest matte-finish tiles for countertops, because high-gloss tiles show scratches more easily. Tile is heatproof, and if you pick larger tiles set close together, you'll minimize grout lines, which stain and collect dirt. Some cooks point out

that you can't roll dough on tile, and that it's tricky to set down delicate glasses or to slide plates and pans over a tile surface.

**Stainless steel is striking, and it's a popular choice for serious cooks** who want a kitchen with a professional, restaurant-style look. Stain-

less is very forgiving—easy to clean, heatproof, stainproof, and sturdy.

### **PICK A MIX TO SUIT YOUR TASTE AND YOUR BUDGET**

Much depends on aesthetics, where you like to work in the kitchen, and your budget. If you love the look and feel of granite but can't swing an entire kitchenful, think about a granite inset or work island, with the rest of your counters in laminate. If you want the look of stone but shiver at cold counters, there's always solid surfacing in a stone-like pattern. If you've found brilliantly colored handmade tiles but want a more functional work surface, save the tile for a backsplash and consider a butcher-block island and laminate countertops.

*Certified kitchen designer Don Silvers is the author of Kitchen Design with Cooking in Mind (NMI, 1994). He's on the Internet at [sildesigns@aol.com](mailto:sildesigns@aol.com).* ♦

## **A choice of countertops for every budget and kitchen design**

*Here's a roundup to help you select the right countertops for your favorite workplace*

<b>Material</b>	<b>Installation per linear foot</b>	<b>Main brands</b>	<b>Care</b>	<b>Heat-proof</b>	<b>Cutting surface</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Laminate	\$30 to \$45	Formica, Wilsonart	wipes clean	no	no	affordable, resists stains, easy care	whole surface needs replacing if damaged, edges need finishing
Solid surfacing	\$100 to \$150	Corian, Avonite, Gibraltar, Surell	wipes clean; repairs with abrasion	no	no	resists stains, easy care, easy repair	more expensive than laminate or tile
Butcher block	\$60 to \$80	various	seal with mineral oil; disinfect with bleach	no	yes	warm looking; cutting surface	burns/stains easily, needs sealing, can't go near sink
Granite	\$150 to \$225	various	use sealer	yes	no	heatproof, cool to the touch, good pastry surface	expensive, stains if improperly sealed
Stainless	\$110 to \$160	various	wipes clean	yes	no	heatproof, cool to the touch, good pastry surface	scratches easily
Ceramic tile	\$45 to \$65	various	wipes clean	yes	no	heatproof, infinite choice, looks great	grout traps dirt, not a ruler-flat surface

Do you have a clever way to peel vegetables, line a cake pan, or keep herbs tasting fresh? Write to **Tips**, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to [fc@taunton.com](mailto:fc@taunton.com). We pay for tips we publish.

## Taming spice in stews and sauces

A friend from Barbados taught me a trick for rescuing a stew or sauce that's searingly hot from too much pepper. Just add a splash of wine; it seems the acid in the wine tames the spice.

—Susan Asanovic,  
Wilton, CT

## Cleaning oil and vinegar bottles

Cleaning unusually shaped oil and herb vinegar bottles is sometimes tricky. Add some uncooked rice to the soap and hot water in the bottle and shake. The rice will help rub off stubborn residue.

—Sylvie Parent,  
Rimouski, Quebec

## Roast meats without a rack

A tasty way to keep roasts off the bottom of the roasting pan without a rack is to set the meat atop several celery ribs or carrots cut lengthwise.

—R. B. Himes,  
Vienna, OH



Improvise a flavorful roasting rack from celery ribs and carrots cut lengthwise.



Stray bits of yolk in your egg whites will adhere to a cloth moistened with cold water.

## Removing egg yolk from whites

Despite my best efforts, sometimes a little yolk gets into the whites when I separate eggs. The stray yolk can be removed by touching it with a corner of a clean cloth that's been moistened with cold water. The yolk will adhere to the cloth, but the white won't.

—Helen D. Conwell,  
Fairhope, AL

## De-fatting canned stock

Canned stock usually comes with a teaspoon or two of fat. Separate the fat from the stock by punching a small hole in the top of the can with a manual can opener. Then punch another slightly bigger hole opposite the first one and pour the stock through the larger opening. The stock pours easily, while the fat stays in the can.

—Kenneth Danko,  
San Francisco, CA

## Ice packs cool warm countertops

Before I had granite countertops (their coolness makes a

particularly good work surface for pastry), I used ice packs to cool my counters so it would be easier to make pastry dough. I wrapped the frozen packs in kitchen towels to keep the countertop dry. I set the packs on the counter for an hour or so before working with the dough. I still do this in the summertime; it makes working with dough much easier.

—Carole Kimball,  
El Cajon, CA

## Grind nuts with sugar to prevent sticking

Making a dessert that calls for nuts? Grind the nuts with some of the sugar from the recipe so that they won't stick together or become oily.

—B. Bader,  
Hartsdale, NY

## Removing water from fresh herbs

To remove excess water from fresh herbs after washing, wrap them in a thick dish-towel by folding it in thirds the long way. Grab an end of the towel in each hand and

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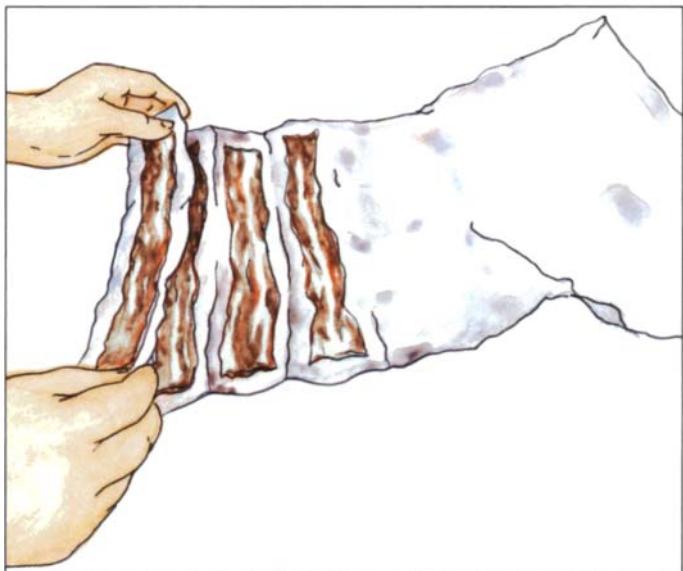
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*Before freezing bacon slices, sandwich them in foil folded in accordion-like pleats; this method makes it easy to peel off one or two slices.*

snap the towel five or six times by moving your hands towards each other slowly and apart very quickly. This method is faster than using a

salad spinner, and it works just as well for small amounts of herbs or greens.

—Nancy Kohl,  
Lynn, MA

## Easy-peeling bacon strips

I like to use bacon as a flavoring, but I rarely use the entire package. I've found a way to ensure that the uncooked bacon doesn't spoil by stashing it in the freezer. I sandwich slices between accor-dioned layers of aluminum foil and then fold the ends over to seal the entire package. This makes it easy to peel off the one or two slices I need, and it keeps the frozen bacon from becoming an un-manageable lump.

—Virginia Teichner,  
Ridgefield, CT

## Blow-drying fruit

If you're making a dish in which fresh fruit must be washed and then completely dried, such as chocolate-dipped strawberries, rinse the

fruit gently and lay it out on a clean terry-cloth dishtowel. Lay another towel on top and gently pat the berries to absorb as much moisture as possible. Then remove the top towel and finish drying the berries using a blow dryer on its "cool" setting.

—Phyllis Kirigin,  
Croton-on-Hudson, NY

## Cleaning coffee grinders

Grinding fresh coffee beans is an essential part of my week-end coffee ritual. After grinding the beans, I use a rather unorthodox tool to clean the grinder: an old-fashioned bristle shaving brush (about \$1 at a bargain store). It does the job as effectively as a more expensive culinary brush.

—Isabella Losinger,  
Burnaby, British Columbia ♦



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*Classic pot roast is made more delicious by marinating it in rosemary and balsamic vinegar.*

# A New Twist on Classic Pot Roast

Fork-tender braised meats get a flavor boost from herbs, vegetables, and even subtle fruits

BY BETH DOOLEY & LUCIA WATSON

**A** pot roast in the oven gives off an aroma that welcomes you into the kitchen and engulfs you in its warm embrace. An American classic, it calls to mind Sunday afternoons spent at grandma's house, sections of the newspaper spread out all over the living room, and the slow, relaxed pace of the day.

Evocative as it is, the term *pot roast* is really a misnomer. The meat, usually a large, inexpensive cut, isn't actually roasted, which would require high, dry heat. Instead, it's braised—cooked in a little liquid with moderate heat until it's fork-tender.

A traditional pot roast, often called a Yankee pot roast, is made with beef and might include in the pot vegetables such as onions, carrots, and potatoes. But we've found that lamb and pork are also wonderful cooked this way, and that the method allows for lively flavor combinations. In our version of the classic, for example, the beef is marinated with rosemary and

balsamic vinegar for extra depth of flavor. Our pork pot roast pairs perfectly with long-cooked fennel and pears, while apricots and orange zest make a sweet-sour stuffing to complement a savory lamb roast.

### THE BEST CUTS FOR POT ROAST ARE ALSO THE CHEAPEST

Pot roast evolved as a brilliant way to use cheap, tough cuts of meat, those from the animal's most-used muscles—the leg, shoulder, and neck. But pot roast isn't only about frugality. We can't really explain the scientific reason, but these tougher cuts yield the most flavor when properly cooked. The long cooking time and moist heat tenderize the meat and draw out the gelatin, which gives the pan juices lots of body.

The specific cuts for pot roast vary slightly depending on the animal the meat comes from. Here are the cuts we like to use. All are boneless.

**For beef**—Chuck roast offers a lot of flavor and not too much fat. Other possibilities include boneless shoulder, rump, or the eye of the round.

**For pork**—A lean pork loin will make a juicy pot roast but not necessarily a tender one. Less expen-

sive cuts, such as a boneless Boston butt (and shoulder butt, cut from the blade), cook longer and become more tender.

**For lamb**—A butterflied leg is well-suited to this method. The meat becomes meltingly tender, and the rendered juices make a silky sauce.

Whatever cut you choose, allow about half a pound per person and trim off any excess fat. If you're cooking a boneless roast, it's best to tie it with butcher's twine at two-inch intervals for uniform cooking and moisture retention.

Because pot roast  
goes its own slow way  
in the oven, it's a  
wonderful dish for the  
busy cook.

### EVERYTHING IN THE POT ADDS TO A FLAVORFUL FINISH

Studding the meat with garlic, marinating it, and rubbing it with spices are all ways to enrich the pot roast's flavor. The meat is often browned in a little fat before it's braised, which adds a caramelized flavor, but we've found that you can skip this step and still have a wonderful tasting dish.

**When choosing a braising liquid, consider the meat's flavor.** Strong-flavored beef and lamb will hold up to a red-wine-based braise, while the more subtly flavored pork requires gentler flavors, such as chicken stock or white wine.



*Lamb stuffed with apricots, currants, and a hint of orange is both homey and exotic. As the lamb braises, its rendered juices contribute to a silky sauce.*



We like to add vegetables—and sometimes fruits—to the pot roast to give the meat and the braising liquid even more flavor. Onions, celery, and carrots are classic aromatic additions and will complement the flavor of any meat. Tomatoes add moisture and break down during cooking, which naturally thickens the sauce. We often serve the vegetables, which have sopped up the tasty meat juices and braising liquid, along with the meat. Other times we strain them out, keeping only their essence in the flavor of the gravy.

**A snug fit keeps flavors concentrated.** As its name implies, you can cook pot roast in a pot. The pot should not be too tall and should have a tight-fitting lid; a Dutch oven works nicely. A roasting

pan covered tightly with aluminum foil also works well, especially for bigger cuts of meat. Be sure the pan or pot offers a snug fit—just big enough to accommodate the meat, some vegetables, and the braising liquid. Too much area encourages evaporation, which can dry up your braising liquid. Though some chefs cook their pot roasts on top of the stove, we prefer the indirect and even heat from the oven.

**The meat is cooked when it's tender** and easily pierced by a thin-bladed knife or sharp-pronged fork. The juices should also run clear. One hour of cooking time per pound of meat is the general rule. The cooked meat should rest to allow the juices to redistribute within the meat. While the meat rests,

***Give the roast a rest***  
to let its juices flow  
evenly throughout  
for the most tender  
texture. Authors Lucia  
Watson (left) and  
Beth Dooley ready  
the rest of the meal.

you can make a simple gravy or finish preparing your side dishes.

**Great gravy starts with the pan juices.** Some roasts, like the beef pot roast below, are delicious served simply with the ingredients that were cooked along with the meat in the roasting pan, the juices degreased if necessary (see the sidebar below). For other roasts, we take the sauce to the next level by cooking the degreased pan juices until reduced by half to thicken the sauce and intensify its flavor. If you want to end up with more liquid, add an equal amount of stock to the juices before reducing. You can season the sauce with a few sprigs of your favorite fresh herbs, a pinch of dried herbs, and a generous splash of red wine, brandy, or dry sherry.

For a silky sauce, whisk in several pats of cold butter or a bit of cream. A dollop of mustard or tomato paste will give the sauce a little body and bright flavor. We don't like to use cornstarch or flour to thicken the sauce because they can make it gummy and muddy the flavor. For a thick, gravy-like sauce without flour, purée the pan vegetables with the degreased juices and season to taste.

## Marinated Beef Pot Roast

An overnight soak makes the meat especially tasty.  
Serves four to six.

*2½ to 3 lb. rump, chuck, eye of round, or shoulder roast*

*3 cloves garlic, slivered*

*1 cup balsamic vinegar*

*2 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary*

*3 medium onions, peeled and thinly sliced*

*14½-oz. can whole tomatoes, chopped, all juices reserved*

*Salt and freshly ground black pepper*

Poke the meat all over with a thin-bladed knife and insert the garlic slivers into the holes.

In a large ceramic dish or bowl, or in a zip-top bag, combine the vinegar and rosemary. Add the meat and turn to coat completely. Cover and refrigerate overnight.



*Keep flavors concentrated with a snug-fitting pot. There should be just enough room for the meat, the vegetables, and the braising liquid.*

Heat the oven to 350°F. Spread the sliced onions in a large casserole or small roasting pan. Nestle the meat into the onions and pour in the remaining marinade. Season the meat with salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and juice. Cover the pot or pan tightly with a lid or aluminum foil. Cook the beef until it is easily pierced with a fork and its juices run clear, 3 to 3½ hours.

Remove the roast from the oven and allow it to rest in the pan for 5 to 10 min. before carving. Serve the sliced meat with the onions, tomatoes, and pan juices (degreased if necessary).

## Degrease pan juices for a better tasting sauce

When making a sauce for pot roast, it's important to remove any fat from the cooking liquid. While the roast is resting, you can degrease the juices in a few different ways.

- ◆ Gently tilt the pan and spoon the fat away, being careful not to stir it into the juices.
- ◆ Pour the juices into a saucepan and set half of the pan over a high flame. The fat will travel to

the coolest part of the pot, where it can be more easily spooned off.

- ◆ If there's a lot of liquid, skim the fat off the surface by dipping a soup ladle under the layer of fat so that it swirls into the ladle's bowl (see photo, right).
- ◆ Strain the juices into a degreasing cup (its spout starts at the bottom of the cup). The fat will rise to the top, and the juices can be poured from the spout.

- ◆ If you're making the pot roast ahead of time, put the strained juices in the refrigerator and let the fat solidify on the surface. To remove the fat, slide the edge of a metal spoon under the fat and lift it out. To reheat the roast, return the meat to the pan, add the degreased juices, cover the roast tightly, and warm it in a low oven.



*Get the grease out. Use a ladle to skim the fat from the pan juices for a better tasting sauce.*



## Leg of Lamb with Apricot-Orange Stuffing

If you butterfly the leg of lamb yourself, hang on to the bones and cook them with the pot roast—they'll boost the sauce's flavor. If your lamb is already butterflied, ask the butcher for a couple of lamb shank bones to add to the pot. *Serves six to eight.*

**1 cup** chopped dried apricots  
**1/2 cup** dried currants or raisins  
**1 1/2 cups** boiling water  
**4 lb.** butterflied leg of lamb  
**3 cloves** garlic, slivered  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
Grated zest of 1 orange  
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme or 1 tsp. dried thyme  
2 medium carrots, coarsely chopped  
1 rib celery, coarsely chopped  
1 large onion, coarsely chopped  
Sprig of fresh thyme (optional)  
Lamb bones (optional)  
1 cup dry red wine  
Juice of 1 orange

Heat the oven to 425°F. In a medium-sized bowl, cover the apricots and currants with the boiling water. Set them aside to plump for about 20 min.

Pierce the lamb all over with a thin-bladed knife and insert the garlic slivers into the holes. Season both sides of the lamb with salt and pepper.

Drain the apricots and currants, reserving the liquid. Spread the fruit, orange zest, and chopped thyme over the interior of the meat, covering it thickly. Beginning with the narrow end, roll up the lamb jelly-roll style. Tie the roll with butcher's twine at 2-inch intervals. Save any filling that spills out of the lamb and add it to the roasting pan.

Set the lamb and any stray filling in a large casserole or roasting pan. Add the carrots, celery, onion, thyme sprig, lamb bones, reserved fruit-soaking liquid, red wine, and orange juice to the pan. Cover the roasting pan tightly with a lid or aluminum foil and cook for 20 min. Reduce the heat to 350°F. Cook the lamb until

it's easily pierced with a fork and its juices run clear, about another 3 hours and 40 min.

Transfer the lamb to a platter or cutting board and cover it loosely with foil. Degrease the pan juices (see the sidebar opposite) and pour them into a small saucepan. Boil the juices, skimming off any grease or scum that rises to the surface, until the liquid is reduced by half, about 15 min. Slice the lamb and serve it with the sauce.

## Pork Roast with Fennel & Pears

The fennel and pears soften during cooking but keep their shape so you can serve them alongside the slices of pork. *Serves four to six.*

**3 to 4 lb.** pork butt, well trimmed  
**4 cloves** garlic, slivered  
**1 bulb** fennel, coarsely chopped (about 1 1/2 cups)  
**3 shallots, minced**  
**3 ripe** pears, peeled, cored, and diced  
**1/4 cup** dry sherry  
**1/4 cup** homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock  
1 Tbs. fennel seeds, chopped  
**1 1/2 tsp.** salt  
**3/4 tsp.** freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 350°F. Poke the meat all over with a thin-bladed knife and insert the garlic slivers into the holes. Put the fennel, shallots, pears, sherry, and stock into a large casserole or small roasting pan; toss to combine. Put the pork in the pan and pat the fennel seeds over the pork. Sprinkle the pork with the salt and pepper. Cover the pan with a lid or foil, and cook the pork until it's easily pierced with a fork and its juices run clear, 3 1/2 to 4 hours. Remove the roast from the oven and allow it to rest in the pan for 5 to 10 min. before carving. Slice and serve with the fennel, pears, and pan juices (degreased if necessary) spooned over the top.

*Beth Dooley is a food writer in Minneapolis. Lucia Watson is the chef at Lucia's, also in Minneapolis. The two recently collaborated on *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland* (Knopf, 1995). ♦*



*Roll the lamb around the stuffing, beginning with the small end.*



*A few quick knots ensure even cooking and keep in the stuffing. Use butcher's twine and tie the meat every two inches.*

# Simmer a Pot of Beans for Good, Hearty Fare

Master the basics and enjoy soulful black bean soup, savory gratins, and white beans fragrant with rosemary

BY DAVID TANIS

I was a Birds Eye baby, raised on frozen vegetables and every 1950s-style convenience food. When my family had beans for dinner, you can be sure those beans came from a can. It wasn't until I left home that I tasted real beans for the first time. They were pinto beans, prepared by a wonderful cook who understood that good food needn't be fancy. She simmered them slowly with a little bacon and onion, ladled them into a shallow plate with lots of the rich broth, and served them with a wedge of

cornbread in the middle. We ate them with a fork. I was immediately, utterly converted—I had never tasted anything better, and I wanted more.

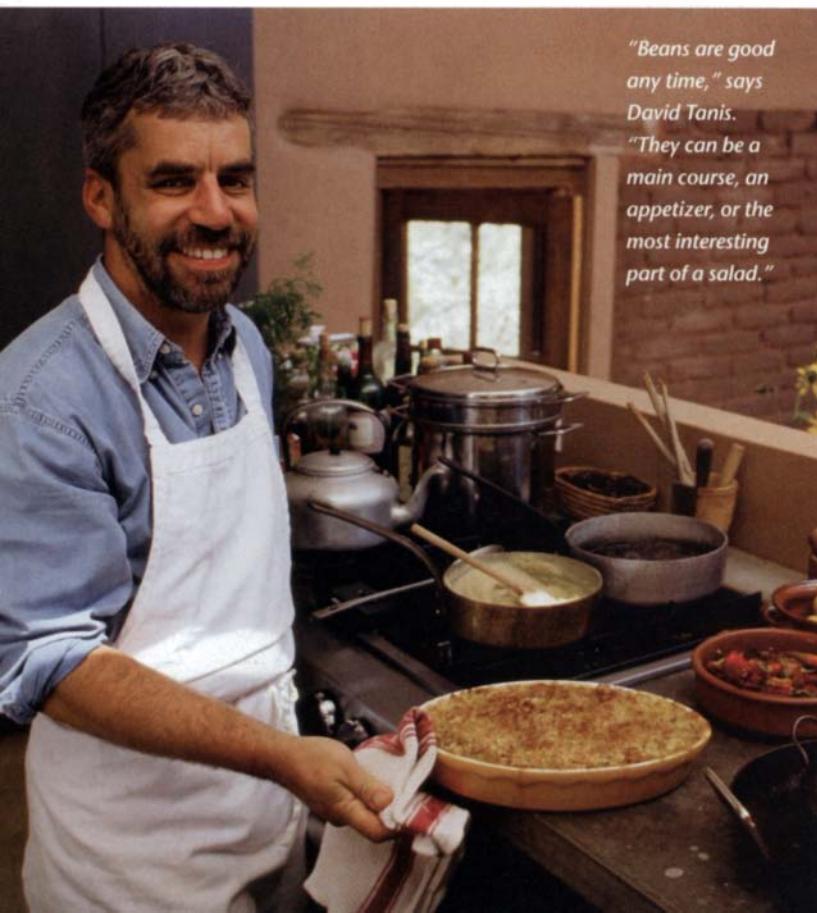
## LOTS OF POSSIBILITIES FROM LOTS OF DIFFERENT BEANS

Along with all kinds of so-called peasant foods, dried beans are enjoying a renaissance of sorts. A staple of almost every cuisine, dried beans are extremely versatile. Some of my favorite ways to

feature their creamy-starchy character are in substantial soups, fortified with herbs and vegetables, and in simple, satisfying salads laced with fruity olive oil. Beans also can be puréed and served as a dip or spread, or mashed, shaped into cakes, and fried. Beans can also make wonderful gratins; I add savory sausage and top them with a crunchy bread-crumb crust.

**You'll find most standard beans at your supermarket:** black, Great Northern, small white, pinto or pink beans, red kidney, chickpeas or garbanzos, black-eyed peas, and limas. I use these types most often.

All beans have their own distinct textures and flavors, but they can often be substituted for one another. Look for beans of a similar size and color as the ones called for in your recipe, but don't be afraid to experiment. Chickpeas have a grainy texture and a flavor that couldn't be more different than creamy, smooth-textured white beans, but they would make a delicious though very



*"Beans are good any time," says David Tanis. "They can be a main course, an appetizer, or the most interesting part of a salad."*





*Hold the tomatoes.  
Wait until the beans  
have softened before  
adding salt or acidic in-  
gredients like tomatoes.  
An hour into the cook-  
ing time, black bean  
soup gets a spicy dose  
of flavor from tomatoes,  
epazote, cumin, and  
coriander.*

different kind of dish if used in the white-bean recipe included here.

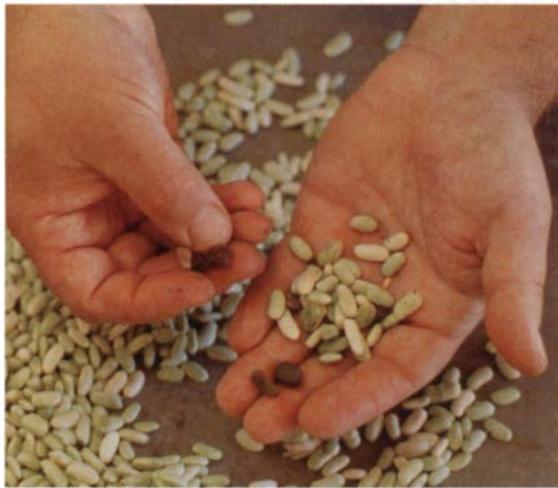
**Even dried beans need to be fresh.** In a more perfect world, beans would be dated for freshness, just the way milk and eggs are. Unlike dairy products, beans can't really go bad, but old beans can take an impossibly long time to cook, and they don't always cook evenly. Since it's difficult to know how old your beans are, buy them from a busy market with a steady turnover and use them soon after you get them home.

#### FOR BETTER TEXTURE AND FASTER COOKING, SOAK YOUR BEANS

Dried beans absorb water through the point at which they were attached to their pods—their belly buttons, so to speak (which, on a bean, is called a hilum). Their skins are less penetrable. While many cooks claim to find little advantage in soaking, I feel that soaking gives beans a better texture and speeds the cooking time a bit. If your beans are from a relatively recent harvest, they should cook quickly without soaking. Beans that have been sitting in the cupboard for a year or more will definitely benefit from a soak.

The standard recipe direction calls to soak beans "overnight." That really means four to eight hours. Don't worry if it's dark or light outside, simply give yourself enough time to soak before you cook.

**If you're pressed for time, the quick-soaking method will help you** get your beans to the table sooner. Put the beans in a large pot, cover them with cold water, and bring to a hard boil. Then turn



**Pick your beans clean.** Before cooking, look over your beans carefully. You're likely to find small stones, broken bits of beans, and other debris. Discard any intruders or you may end with rocks in your soup.

off the heat, cover the pan, and let the beans soak for an hour.

**Look out for "floaters."** In the process of turning from fresh beans to dried, beans sometimes shrink within their skins, creating air pockets that may hide dirt. You can't tell if your beans have shrunk just by looking at them, but the trapped air will make the beans buoyant enough to float. Skim off any floaters and toss them out.

#### For more delicious beans, let them cool in their broth so the flavors can meld.

#### HOW TO COOK BEANS

The basic principle for cooking all beans is the same, no matter how you plan to use them in a recipe.

- ◆ Before you cook them, pick through the beans and remove any stones, broken beans, or other bits of debris. It isn't unusual for a bit of the bean field to end up in the bag along with your dried beans.
- ◆ Put the beans in a large, heavy-based pot, cover them with cold water—usually six to eight cups per pound of beans—and bring the water to a hard boil.
- ◆ Reduce the heat and let the beans simmer. Skim any foam that rises to the surface. Add any herbs, spices, or aromatic vegetables.
- ◆ About halfway through the cooking time, when the beans have softened, add the salt and any acidic ingredients like tomatoes. Beans require a good dose of salt to bring out their full flavor, but salt and



**Refresh your beans before you cook.** Some cooks suggest that cooking beans in the same water they're soaked in can make the beans more difficult to digest.



#### **Simmer beans slowly.**

Like all beans, these white beans are best cooked over low heat. If cooked at too high a heat, the skins are likely to burst, and the beans will turn to mush.

acids inhibit water penetration and, when added too soon, can toughen the beans.

◆ When the beans are fully cooked, taste one and adjust the seasonings as needed. Then let them sit off the heat for at least an hour for the flavors to meld. If you're afraid the beans will overcook while sitting in the hot broth, strain them and cool the beans and broth separately; then, when both are cool, recombine them.

**Gentle simmering makes the best beans.** Keep the heat low to give your beans time to absorb flavor from the aromatics in the pot and to develop



*Give hot beans a quick cool down. Dump the cooked beans into a shallow baking dish. The increased surface area helps the steam evaporate so the beans cool more quickly.*

their own rich taste. Slow cooking will also keep beans from bursting through their skins.

The size, variety, and age of your beans will determine how long they need to cook. Also, consider how you plan to use the beans. For a bean salad, you'll want the beans to remain whole. But if you're making a soup, cook the beans a little longer until they break down a bit and thicken the broth.

**Most beans improve in flavor and texture if cooked a day in advance.** But it's important to cool beans quickly if you don't plan to eat them the day they're cooked. Once cooled, refrigerate the beans until they're well chilled before storing them in a closed container. If kept at room temperature for too long, beans can sour and ferment.

#### **Black Bean Soup with Tomato-Tomatillo Salsa**

*Epazote*, an herb often used in Mexican cooking, adds an authentic, musky undertone to this soup, and some claim it makes beans easier to digest. Look for *epazote* in Mexican groceries or order some from Penzeys, Ltd. (414/564-0277). If you can't find chipotle chiles, use cayenne instead. Your soup will have nice spicy kick, but you'll miss the distinctive smoky flavor that's found only in chipotles. *Yields about 6 cups.*

**1 lb. dried black beans**  
**2 Tbs. vegetable oil**  
**2 large onions, finely diced**  
**4 to 6 cloves garlic, minced**

*(Ingredient list continues)*

1 cup peeled, seeded, and chopped tomato (fresh or canned)  
Small sprig fresh or dried epazote (optional)  
1 Tbs. finely chopped canned chipotle chile (or 1/4 tsp. cayenne; more to taste)  
1 tsp. ground cumin seed  
1 tsp. ground coriander  
2 tsp. salt

**FOR THE SALSA:**

1 large tomato, finely diced  
3 medium tomatillos, husks removed and finely diced  
1 small red onion, very finely diced  
1 serrano or jalapeño chile, very finely diced  
1/4 cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro leaves  
Salt to taste

**FOR THE GARNISH:**

*Crème fraîche* or sour cream

Pick over the beans. Soak if desired and drain. In a deep, heavy-based pot, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onions and cook until translucent, about 5 min. Add the beans, garlic, and 6 cups cold water. Bring to a boil, skimming any foam that rises to the surface. Reduce to a simmer and when the beans are soft, after about 1 hour, add the tomato, *epazote* if using, chipotle chile, cumin, coriander, and salt. Continue cooking until the beans start to break down and the broth begins to thicken. Taste for seasoning; add salt and pepper if needed. If you're serving this soup immediately, you may want to thicken it by puréeing a cup or two of the beans in a blender or food processor and then recombining them with the rest of the soup. The soup will thicken on its own if refrigerated overnight.

**To make the salsa**—In a small bowl, combine the tomato, tomatillos, onion, jalapeño, and cilantro. Taste for seasoning and add salt as needed. This salsa will taste best if assembled no more than an hour before serving.

Ladle the soup into individual serving bowls and garnish each portion with a spoonful of *crème fraîche* and the salsa.

### Gratin of Flageolet Beans & Sausage

Tiny French flageolet beans have a delicate, mild flavor and make a wonderful gratin. For more flavorful beans, let them sit in their broth overnight and bake the gratin the following day. Serves six.

**FOR THE BEANS:**

1 lb. dried flageolet beans  
1 large onion, peeled and quartered

**Cassoulet made easy.** This bean and sausage gratin is an uncomplicated version of the classic French dish.



## Heirloom beans are prized for their flavor

Many specialty groceries now carry what are called heirloom beans. Usually more flavorful than their uniformly bred cousins, these beans come in a range of sizes, shapes, and colors: brown-speckled Jacob's Cattle; fat, white Aztecs; black-spotted Appaloosas; Scarlet Runners; Anasazi beans. Heirloom varieties are well worth seeking out.

Choose from a wide selection of unusual beans grown by my friend Elizabeth Berry. For a brochure and order form, send one dollar and a self-addressed, business-size envelope to Elizabeth Berry, Gallina Canyon Ranch, PO Box 706, Abiquiu, NM 87510.

*1 head garlic, cloves separated but not peeled*

*1 bay leaf*

*1 sprig fresh sage*

*1 sprig fresh thyme*

*2 tsp. salt*

**FOR THE GRATIN:**

*6 Tbs. olive oil or rendered duck fat, or a combination*

*2 large onions, finely diced*

*Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste*

*1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh thyme*

*1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh sage*

*6 to 8 cloves garlic, minced*

*1 lb. French-style garlic sausage or sweet Italian sausage*

*2 cups homemade breadcrumbs*

*Homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock if needed*

**To prepare the beans**—Pick over the beans. Soak if desired and drain. In a large, heavy-based pot, cover the beans with 8 cups cold water. Add the onion, garlic, bay leaf, sage, and thyme; bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to a bare simmer, skimming any foam that rises to the surface. Simmer gently until the beans have softened, about 1½ hours. Add the salt and continue cooking until the beans are quite tender, 20 to 30 min. longer. Allow the beans to cool in the broth. Refrigerate overnight to let the flavors meld.

**To prepare the gratin**—Heat the oven to 450°F. Drain the beans, reserving the cooking liquid. Discard the garlic and any stems from the herbs.

In a frying pan, heat 4 Tbs. of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions, ¼ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper; cook until the onions are soft and lightly browned, about 10 min. Add the thyme, sage, and garlic; cook 1 min. longer.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the beans with the onion mixture. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and pepper if needed. The mixture should be highly seasoned. Transfer the beans to a shallow 2½-qt. casserole.

In a hot frying pan, brown the sausages well on all sides. Let the sausages cool before cutting them into 1½-inch thick slices. Arrange the sliced sausages over the beans, then push them down beneath the surface of the beans with a wooden spoon.

Bring the reserved cooking liquid to a boil and pour enough of it into the casserole to barely cover the beans (add chicken stock if there isn't enough). Sprinkle the breadcrumbs over the top and, with a wooden spoon, push them down a bit to absorb some of the liquid. Drizzle the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil over the top. Cover with aluminum foil, set the pan on a baking sheet to catch any drips, and bake for 30 min. Reduce the heat to 325°F. and continue cooking for 45 min. Remove the foil and cook until the surface is golden brown and the juices are bubbling, about 15 min. longer.

## White Beans with Rosemary & Olive Oil

This recipe works well with any large, meaty bean. Serve the dish warm or at room temperature. It could accompany grilled tuna and tomatoes in summer or lamb chops with radicchio in the winter months. *Yields about 8 cups.*



*Beans make a meal. With a loaf of good bread and a small salad, these luscious White Beans with Rosemary & Olive Oil make a simple but satisfying supper.*

*1 lb. large dried white beans, such as cannellini or Giant Aztec*

*1 large onion, peeled and quartered*

*1 head garlic, cloves separated but not peeled*

*Sprigs of fresh rosemary, thyme, and sage*

*2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for garnish*

*2 tsp. salt*

*1 tsp. ground fennel seed*

*1 tsp. dried red pepper flakes; more or less to taste*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*Chopped fresh rosemary for garnish*

Pick over the beans. Soak if desired and drain. In a large, heavy-based pot, cover the beans with 8 cups cold water. Add the onion, garlic, and herb sprigs and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to a bare simmer, skimming any foam that rises to the surface. When the beans are almost tender, after about 1 hour, add the olive oil, salt, ground fennel, and pepper flakes. Continue cooking until the beans are very tender but still whole, about 30 min. longer. Taste the beans and broth; add more salt if necessary. Allow the beans to cool in the broth for at least 1 hour before serving.

To serve, warm the beans in the broth, and then transfer the beans to a platter with a slotted spoon, discarding the onion, garlic, and herb sprigs. Garnish with a drizzle of olive oil, a few grindings of black pepper, and the chopped rosemary.

*David Tanis is a chef and author who cooks and lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. ♦*



MENU

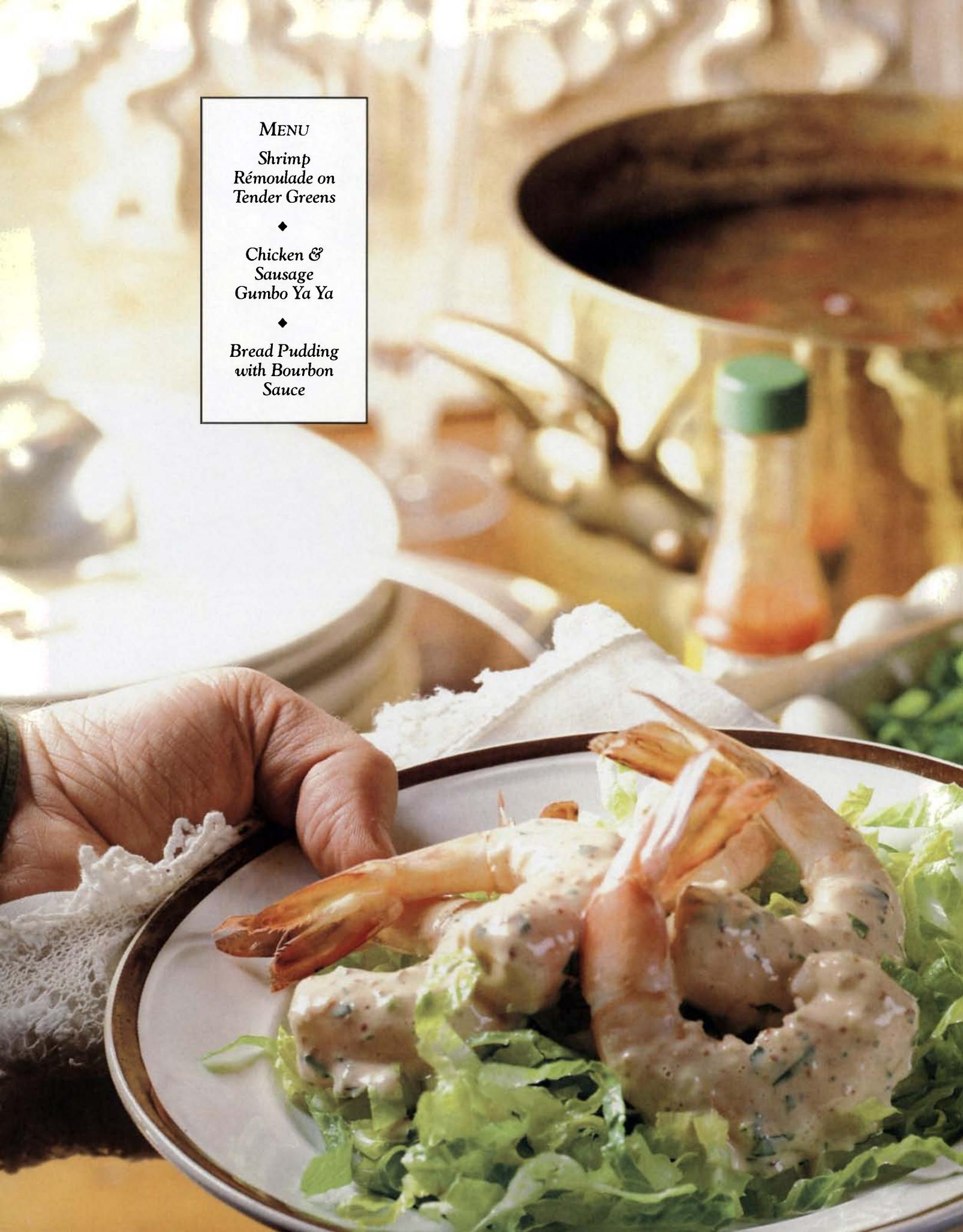
*Shrimp  
Rémoulade on  
Tender Greens*

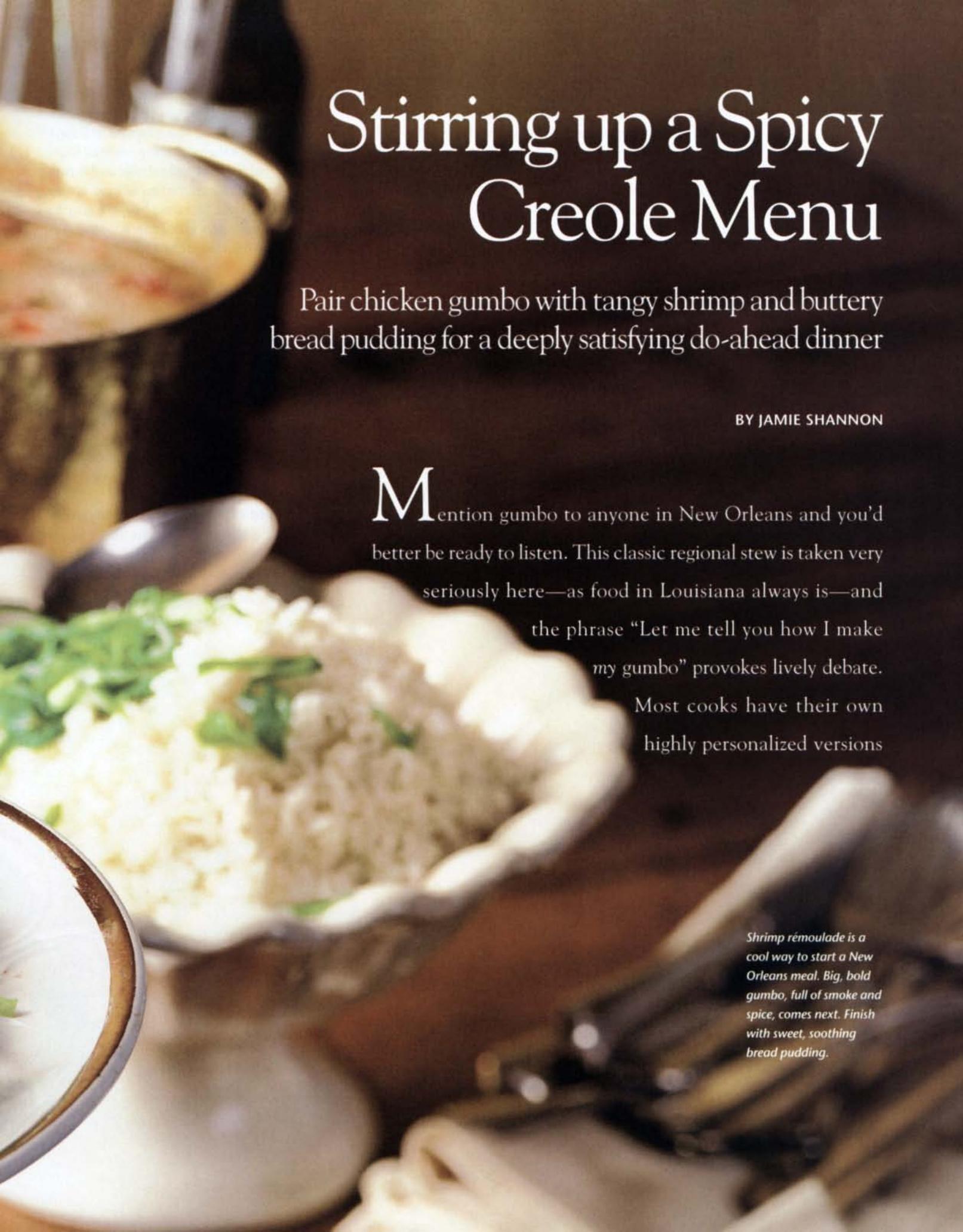


*Chicken &  
Sausage  
Gumbo Ya Ya*



*Bread Pudding  
with Bourbon  
Sauce*





# Stirring up a Spicy Creole Menu

Pair chicken gumbo with tangy shrimp and buttery bread pudding for a deeply satisfying do-ahead dinner

BY JAMIE SHANNON

**M**ention gumbo to anyone in New Orleans and you'd better be ready to listen. This classic regional stew is taken very seriously here—as food in Louisiana always is—and the phrase “Let me tell you how I make my gumbo” provokes lively debate.

Most cooks have their own highly personalized versions

*Shrimp remoulade is a cool way to start a New Orleans meal. Big, bold gumbo, full of smoke and spice, comes next. Finish with sweet, soothing bread pudding.*

made from seafood, poultry, sausage, game, or vegetables in a dizzying number of combinations. As the chef of a busy New Orleans restaurant, I have the luxury of making a different gumbo every day, but like every gumbo cook, I have my favorites. At home, I always stir up a big pot of chicken and sausage gumbo, known as Gumbo Ya Ya, during Mardi Gras season.

Gumbo is great for entertaining because the slow simmer gives me time to put together the rest of the menu: cool and tangy shrimp rémoulade on salad greens and a buttery, bourbon bread pudding.

#### ONE BIG POT IS ALL YOU NEED

I like to cook everything—the chicken, the vegetables, and the entire gumbo—all in one heavy-based soup pot. This way I'm building layers of flavor as I go (and spending less time at the sink afterwards).

I first sear the chicken (thighs, for more flavor) in hot oil, followed by the vegetable mix, called a *mirepoix* (pronounced meer-PAWAH). Once the vegetables and chicken are browned, it's time to make the roux, the thing that makes gumbo gumbo.

*Gumbo is everything you want in one bowl—spicy sausage, tender chicken, lots of vegetables, all bound by a deep, savory mahogany sauce.*

**Equal parts flour and oil make a roux.** For an evenly cooked brown roux (pronounced ROO), use a low flame and stir constantly, being careful to scrape the bottom and sides of the pot. The roux may foam

at first but will subside and slowly turn a light brown as long as you *go slow*. Making a brown roux can take anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes, depending on the fat, the pot, and the level of heat. The longer it cooks, the smokier and deeper its flavor. The roux is ready when it turns a rich, mahogany brown and gives off a nutty, toasty aroma. Don't walk away while the roux cooks because if it burns (it will look grainy and smell acrid),

you'll need to start over with fresh oil and flour.

**A rich stock adds flavor to the stew.** For chicken gumbo, I like to use a good chicken stock. Vegetable stock or even water will do, but the end flavor will be a bit lighter.

**Simmering and skimming are the keys to a savory gumbo.** Be especially diligent about skimming the stew during the first half hour. After that, just skim any time you see any froth or fat floating on

## Gumbo gets its rich, mysterious flavor from brown roux and a long, slow simmer.



the top. After several hours, the chicken will fall from the bone, letting you know that the gumbo is ready.

**Filé powder gives this gumbo its smooth texture.** Cooking a roux until brown adds a lot of flavor but destroys its ability to thicken liquid. This means finding another method for thickening gumbo. Some cooks use okra, which goes in the pot at the start and adds its thick, sticky juices to the stew; other cooks use filé powder—a rich, brown powder ground from sassafras leaves—which is added at the end. No self-respecting gumbo cook would ever use the two together—the gumbo would be too thick, and the individual flavors of each would disappear.

I prefer filé powder because I like its slightly sweet, woodsy flavor. You can buy filé powder in lots of grocery stores now; look in the spice section. If you can't find it, you can order it from Penzeys, Ltd., PO Box 1448, Waukesha, WI 53187; 414/574-0277. Add filé powder at the last minute or it will turn stringy.

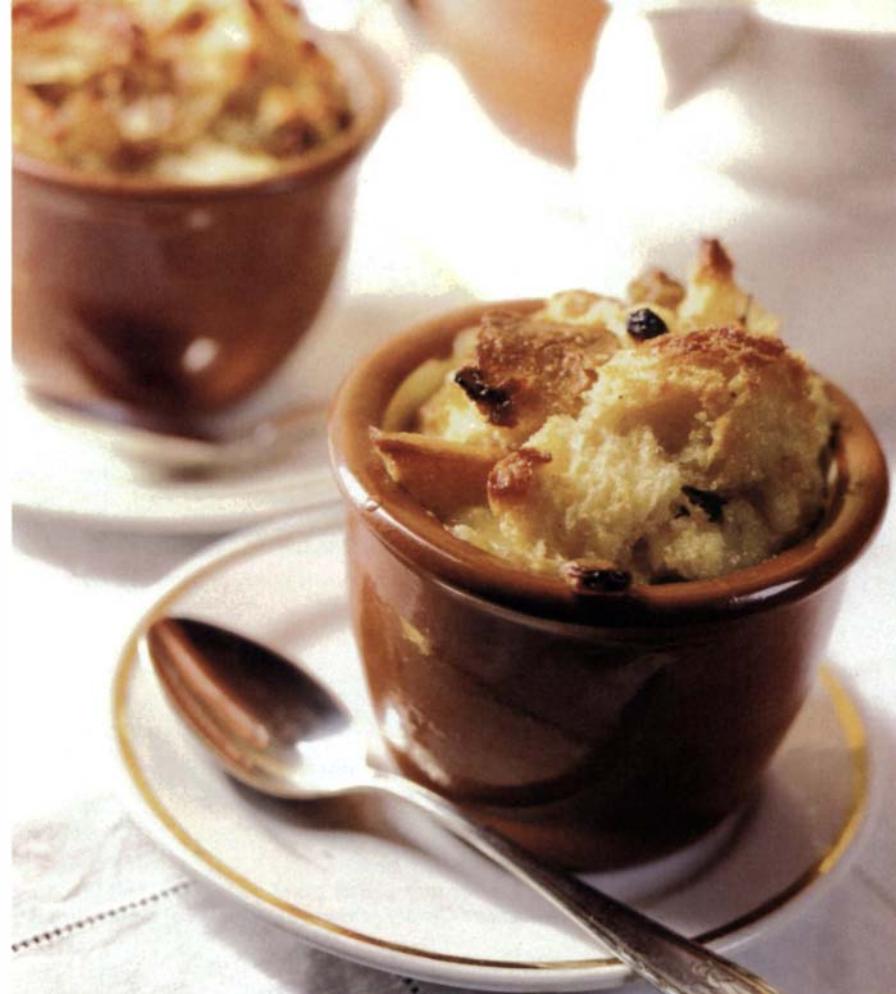
### SHRIMP REMOULADE FOR STARTERS

Like gumbo, recipes for rémoulade sauce vary from parish to parish, even from house to house. Inspired by the classic French mayonnaise-style sauce made with capers, cornichons, and tarragon, New Orleans rémoulade sauce has been spiced up by Creole cooks.

My version is made pale pink with tomato paste and gets a little kick from vinegar and Creole mustard. The cool, fresh, briny flavors of boiled shrimp dressed in rémoulade sauce provide a good balance to the hearty gumbo.

**Beyond a good sauce, a great shrimp rémoulade needs perfectly cooked shrimp.** Undoubtedly, this begins with fresh shrimp—if you can find them. If not, uncooked frozen white, pink, or brown shrimp are best. Avoid tigershrimp (easily identified by their striped shells) which can be inconsistent in quality.

Traditionally, shrimp are boiled in water that's highly seasoned with cayenne, plenty of salt, and other spices—called a *boil*. Have the pot boiling hard when you add the shrimp and a slotted spoon ready to scoop up the shrimp as soon as they're pink and cooked through. Keep in mind that shrimp can quickly overcook, making them tough and flavorless. Once cooked, plunge them in a bowl of ice water to avoid carry-over cooking. I like to save the boiling liquid and add some of it, along with more salt, to the shrimp (with plenty of ice) as they cool. This gives the shrimp a zestier flavor and helps to keep them tender. It's best not to refrigerate the shrimp at this point but to



*So New Orleans (and so easy), bread pudding is the perfect foil for spicy gumbo. A bourbon sauce lifts the version a notch above homey.*

serve them closer to room temperature: the flavor will be fuller, and the texture more tender.

### BREAD PUDDING MAKES A COMFORTING FINISH

Bread pudding has long been a favorite New Orleans dessert. One of the reasons this pudding is so delicious is the local French bread, which is incredibly light and tender with a good crisp crust. Buy the bread a day or two in advance and let it dry out so it can really soak up the sweet egg custard.

### Shrimp Rémoulade

The rémoulade sauce may be made a day in advance, but it's best to cook the shrimp an hour or so before serving. *Serves eight as an appetizer; yields 1 1/3 cups sauce.*

#### FOR THE REMOULADE SAUCE:

- 1 Tbs. white-wine vinegar
- 1 Tbs. prepared yellow mustard
- 2 Tbs. Creole or country-style Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. tomato paste
- 1 small clove garlic
- Dash Tabasco
- 1/2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 egg
- 1/4 tsp. paprika
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 3 Tbs. chopped scallions (white and pale green parts from about 2 small scallions)
- 3 Tbs. chopped celery
- 2 Tbs. chopped flat-leaf parsley
- Salt to taste

(Ingredient list continues)



A spicy "boil" gives shrimp more flavor. Cook them until they're just barely opaque through the center; overcooking makes shrimp tough.

#### FOR THE SHRIMP:

*1/3 cup salt, preferably kosher  
1 Tbs. cayenne  
2 Tbs. whole black peppercorns  
2 lemons, cut in quarters  
1 large clove garlic  
4 bay leaves  
1 medium onion, diced  
1 1/2 lb. large shrimp, peeled and deveined but tails left on  
Tender leafy lettuce (such as Bibb or Boston) cut into strips*

**For the sauce**—In a food processor, combine the vinegar, mustards, tomato paste, garlic, Tabasco, lemon juice, egg, and paprika. Pulse to mix. With the processor running, slowly add the oil in a steady stream. Add the scallions, celery, parsley, and salt to taste; pulse briefly to combine. Overprocessing at this point may make the sauce separate. Chill.

**For the shrimp**—In a 6- to 8-qt. pan, combine 1 gallon of water, 1/4 cup of the salt, the cayenne, peppercorns, lemon, garlic, bay leaves, and onion. Bring to a boil and simmer for 15 min. Add the shrimp and cook until they're pink and just barely opaque through the center, about 3 min. Pull the shrimp from the boil and put them in a large bowl. Cover with ice and then add 2 cups of the boil liquid to the iced shrimp. Soak for 5 min. Add the remaining salt. When the shrimp is well chilled, drain.

Before serving, dip each shrimp in the remoulade sauce to coat and arrange them on a bed of the lettuce.



An ice bath stops the cooking. A quick soak in a little of the cooled boil boosts the flavor.

#### Gumbo Ya Ya

Andouille sausage is traditional for this gumbo, but any spicy smoked sausage will do. Serves eight as a main course or twelve as an appetizer.

*3 Tbs. plus 3/4 cup vegetable oil  
2 1/2 lb. skinless chicken thighs  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
1 cup flour  
1 medium bunch celery, cleaned and thinly sliced  
4 large onions, diced  
4 green or red bell peppers, diced  
2 Tbs. minced garlic  
1/2 to 1 tsp. cayenne or 5 fresh cayenne peppers, diced  
3/4 tsp. dried oregano  
3/4 tsp. dried basil  
3/4 tsp. dried thyme  
4 bay leaves  
8 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock or water  
1 1/2 lb. andouille sausage or other spicy smoked sausage, cut into 1/2-inch chunks  
1 Tbs. filé powder  
6 cups cooked white rice  
Chopped scallions for garnish  
Tabasco or other Louisiana-style hot sauce*

In a heavy-based soup pot, heat 3 Tbs. of the oil over high heat until almost smoking. While the oil is heating, season the chicken generously with salt and pepper, dust it with 1/4 cup of the flour, and shake off the excess. Sear the chicken in the hot oil until golden brown, turning once to brown both sides, 4 min. on each side. Remove the chicken and set aside.



## Drink Choices

**Gumbo's deep, dark spiciness needs quenching from a cold beer**

Mardi Gras means merriment, mouth-searing Cajun and Creole mainstays, and mammoth thirsts. But wine lovers beware: this food needs the grain, not the grape.

You'll find lots of quality-crafted beers in every corner of

the country these days—well balanced, clean, and refreshing, with enough sweetness to tame some of the flame.

Try a light-colored brew with the Shrimp Remoulade. Look for blonde, golden, or wheat beer (the Germans call it "Weizen"), or

pale ale. With the Gumbo Ya Ya's deep, rich roux and smoky sausage flavors, you'll want a darker brew, often dubbed amber, brown, even black, or the German "Dunkel," meaning dark.

Try seeking out the down-home New Orleans originals. Dixie

Beer, light and clean, is a good partner for the shrimp, while Dixie Blackened Voodoo Lager is rich enough for the gumbo. And let the good times roll.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco Bay area.*

Let the oil reheat for a minute and then reduce the heat to medium high and add the celery, onions, and peppers and cook until soft, 10 to 12 min., stirring to prevent scorching. Remove the vegetables and any liquid from the pan and set aside. Add  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup oil to the pot and let it heat up for a minute over medium heat. Slowly add the remaining flour to the pan and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture is the color of chocolate, 10 to 20 min. Stir carefully, being sure to scrape the sides and bottom of the pot to prevent scorching. Pay attention not to burn the roux; if you do burn it, you'll need to start over.

When the roux has reached a good mahogany brown, return the cooked vegetables to the pot, along with the garlic, cayenne, oregano, basil, thyme, and bay leaves. Stir to scrape the bottom of the pot and cook until well combined, 3 to 5 min. Season with salt and pepper.

Slowly add the stock while stirring until smoothly blended. Add the seared chicken and the sausage. Bring to a simmer and skim off excess fat. Simmer uncovered for 2½ hours, skimming any foam or fat that rises to the surface. When the chicken meat falls from the bones, remove the bones from the pot and discard.

Return the soup to a boil and stir in the filé powder, stirring vigorously to avoid clumping, until the filé powder is dissolved. Taste for seasoning, adding salt and pepper as necessary. Serve the gumbo in bowls over cooked white rice with chopped scallions and Tabasco to taste.

### Bread Pudding with Bourbon Sauce

To bake this in one large dish instead of individual custard cups, simply add 10 minutes to the cooking time. Serves eight; yields about 1 cup sauce.

**1½ cup golden raisins**  
**3 Tbs. bourbon**  
**5 eggs**  
**¾ cup sugar**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**½ tsp. ground cinnamon**  
**¼ tsp. ground nutmeg**  
**Pinch salt**  
**3 cups heavy cream**  
**8 oz. stale white bread with crusts, preferably Italian or French, torn into 1-inch pieces**

#### FOR THE SAUCE:

**1½ cups heavy cream**  
**½ cup sugar**  
**3 Tbs. bourbon**  
**¼ tsp. ground cinnamon**

In a small saucepan over medium-low heat, combine the raisins and bourbon and heat gently until the liquid is evaporated and the raisins are plump, about 7 min.

In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar, vanilla, spices, and salt. Stir in the cream until well blended. Toss in the torn bread and plumped raisins and stir together. Let the mixture sit for 15 min., stirring occasionally, to allow the bread to soak up the liquid. The pudding may be made ahead until this point and refrigerated for 4 hours until you're ready to bake.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter eight 6-oz. custard cups or ramekins. Divide the bread mixture among the custard cups and pour any remaining custard over the top of each. Set the cups in a baking pan or shallow roasting pan and add enough water to the pan to come halfway up the sides of the cups. Bake until the puddings are

## Three steps to good gumbo



*First make a roux with approximately equal weights of oil and flour. Use a heavy-based pan, stir with a wooden spoon, and go slow.*



*Cook the roux until it's glossy and a rich dark brown. It should smell toasty and nutty, not burnt.*

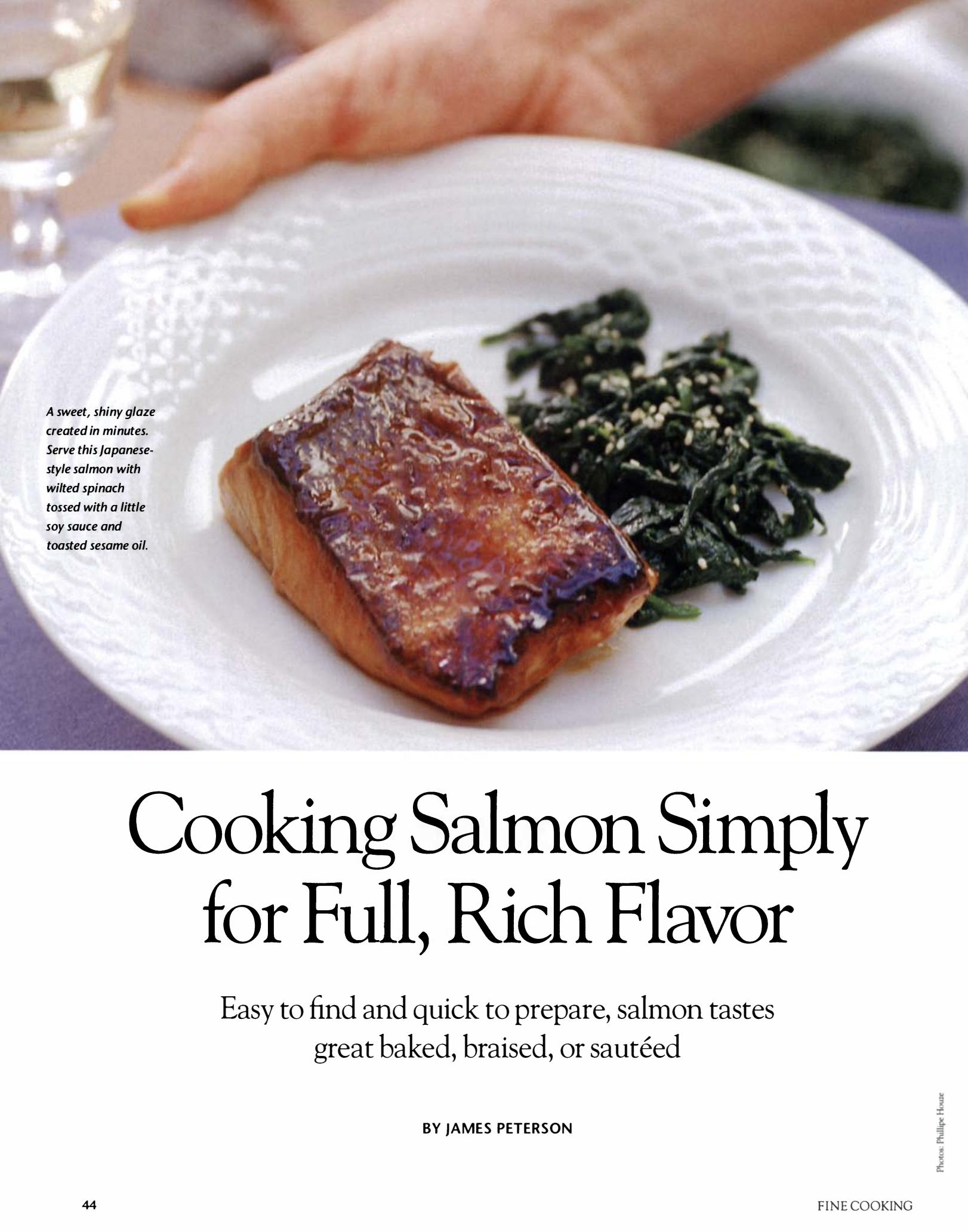


*Add the vegetables carefully—brown roux is extremely hot. The "Holy Trinity"—celery, onion, and bell pepper—gives the gumbo a true Creole flavor.*

browned on top and a knife inserted in the center comes out barely clean, about 50 min.

**To make the sauce**—In a small saucepan, combine the cream and sugar. Dissolve the sugar over medium heat and let the mixture come slowly to a boil. Cook, boiling gently, until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, 5 to 7 min. (235°F on a candy thermometer). Remove from the heat and stir in the bourbon and cinnamon. Serve the sauce warm on the side.

*Jamie Shannon is the chef at Commander's Palace in New Orleans. ♦*



A sweet, shiny glaze  
created in minutes.  
Serve this Japanese-  
style salmon with  
wilted spinach  
tossed with a little  
soy sauce and  
toasted sesame oil.



# Cooking Salmon Simply for Full, Rich Flavor

Easy to find and quick to prepare, salmon tastes great baked, braised, or sautéed

BY JAMES PETERSON

**S**almon is an easy fish to love. When cooked, it has a delicate pink color, a tender texture, and a rich flavor with just a hint of sea breezes. It's also relatively inexpensive (about \$2 to \$3 less per pound than tuna or swordfish), it's easy to handle, and it can be prepared just about any way with the possible exception of deep-frying. While wild salmon is for most of us a rare treat, farmed salmon, also called Atlantic salmon, is always available and almost always extremely fresh.

#### STEAKS AND FILLETS—THE EASY WAY TO HANDLE SALMON

Versatile salmon comes in a variety of forms. You can buy a whole fish—worth the trouble if you're cooking for a large crowd—or a whole side of salmon. Most often, however, you'll find fillets (pieces cut from the side) and steaks (horseshoe-shaped pieces cut crosswise to include the backbone). Steaks and fillets cook in almost the same way, so you can often use them interchangeably.

**Buying the best fillet.** For the freshest fish, ask for one large piece (about 1½ pounds for four servings) cut from a whole side of salmon, and then cut that piece into individual servings yourself. You'll likely get fresher fillets this way, not ones that were cut days before. Also, try to get a piece from the center of the side. Fillets from the tail end are thinner, while those from the head end are thicker and sometimes awkward to handle.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE BONES?

A salmon has a central backbone, ribs, and small pin bones, which are embedded in a row down its sides. Even if

you buy a salmon fillet, chances are you'll still come across pin bones.

**A quick tug is all you need to remove pin bones.** To find the pin bones on a fillet, run your finger along the middle of the flesh; you'll easily feel the bones. Use tweezers, small pliers, or your thumbnail and forefinger to pinch the bones one at a time and give them a yank. They should slide right out. In a steak, the pin bones are still attached to the backbone so you'll have to pull harder to remove them.

**For pretty steaks, make boneless medallions.** The large bones in salmon steaks are easy to eat around, so you don't have to remove them. But I find steaks unwieldy, so I bone them and shape them into medallions (see photos on p. 46), which only takes a few extra minutes.

#### QUICK METHODS TO COOK SALMON

A whole poached salmon is perfect for a summertime party. And with its moderate to high fat content, salmon is great on the grill. But in winter, I usually stick to the oven and stove, which means baking, braising, or sautéing the fish.

**Baking is the simplest way to go.** Just arrange the salmon in an oiled baking dish and bake until done. I like to spread a thin layer of garlic, herbs, and breadcrumbs on top to make a fragrant crust. Steaks and fillets both bake well.

**Braising salmon makes an easy base for a sauce.** Cooking the fish in a little liquid with aromatic herbs and vegetables has the advantage of supplying you with a sauce base that's rich with the salmon's flavor. The liquid can be served as a light broth surrounding the fish, or cooked down to the consistency of a



*Jim Peterson cuts a salmon steak to make a boneless medallion. See his method on the next page.*

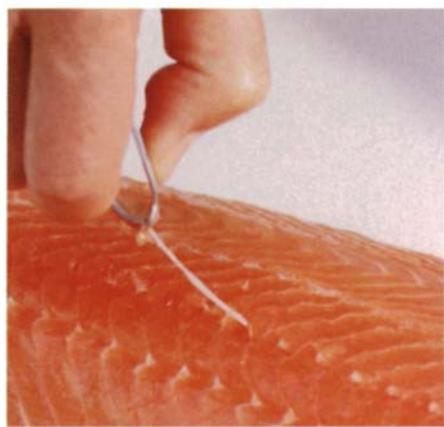
more traditional sauce. Fillets are fine to braise, but I think steak medallions look more dramatic served this way. Steaks are also generally thicker, so the longer cooking time lets the flavors in the braising liquid mingle and develop.

**Swift sautéing brings out flavor.** Sautéing salmon means cooking it on the stove in a little fat, such as butter or olive oil. You can sauté salmon steaks with good results, but I prefer sautéing fillets. Usually thinner, fillets cook quickly, and if they still have their skin on, they yield the extra benefit of delicious, crisp skin. I often dress up my sautéed fillets with a shiny sweet-and-savory soy glaze.

#### KEEP SALMON FROM STICKING

Like most fish, salmon loves to stick to the sauté pan. Using a nonstick pan helps, but sometimes salmon will even stick to that. Here are a few tips to prevent sticking:

- ◆ **Start with perfectly dry fish.** Pat it with paper towels before it goes in the pan.
- ◆ **Make sure the fat is hot.** Test it by dribbling a drop of water or two in the pan; it should sizzle.
- ◆ **Shake the pan when adding the fish.** While putting the salmon in the pan, shake the pan back and forth so that the fish moves over the pan's surface for the first 5 or 10 seconds of cooking.
- ◆ **Turn the fish only once.** This won't necessarily keep it from sticking, but it lessens the chance of the fish falling apart.



*A quick tug gets rid of the pin bones. Use pincers, pliers, or tweezers to pull these easy-to-find bones.*

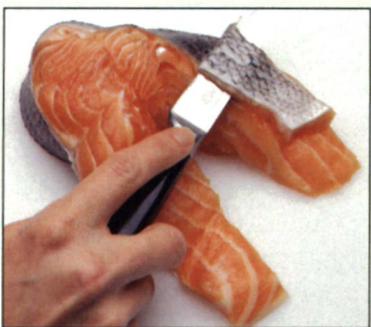


*For the freshest fish, buy a large section of salmon side. Then cut it to size yourself.*

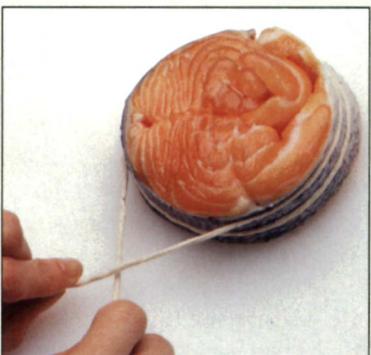
# Turn a salmon steak into a compact, boneless medallion



*Cut out the backbone and any ribs with a small, sharp knife. Slide the knife just under the bones that adhere to the inside of the stomach flaps and cut along the backbone almost all the way to the skin. Cut out the backbone but don't cut through the skin.*



*Keep the skin on the outside of the medallion by cutting a 1 1/2-inch section of skin from one of the flaps. Roll this flap in toward the center of the steak.*



*Overlap the other flap to make a round medallion and tie it with kitchen twine. The twine and skin come off easily after cooking.*

if it does stick. Begin with the best-looking side facing down in the pan. If the fillets have their skin, start with that side down. If they're skinless, cook the bone side first; the skinned side may have some harmless but unsightly discoloration.

## DETERMINING DONENESS

Salmon generally needs about nine minutes of cooking per inch of thickness. Actual cooking times depend on the shape and size of the steak or fillet, on the cooking temperature, and on how you like your fish cooked.

**The foolproof way: cut into the fish.** The trick is to do this discreetly by cutting into the underside of the fish. Properly cooked salmon should be just starting to turn pale and opaque, but you want to see a lightly translucent trace of bright orange toward the middle of the fish. Salmon that's completely opaque and pale orange throughout is overcooked.

**The advanced method: touch.** A more subtle, less intrusive way to determine doneness is by feeling the fish. Touch the salmon or squeeze it gently. Raw or undercooked salmon feels fleshy. As salmon cooks, it becomes firmer. The idea is to stop cooking the instant the salmon begins to feel firm. This method takes some practice, but you can train yourself by feeling the salmon each time you cut into it—you'll soon get the knack.

## Soy-Glazed Sautéed Salmon

Mirin, a very sweet sake, is sold in most supermarkets, as is Japanese dark soy sauce. If you can't find mirin, a little sugar dissolved in water works fine—or use bottled teriyaki sauce for the glaze. Serves four.



*An easy sauce created from the braising liquid surrounds the salmon steak medallion.*

**1 1/2 lb. salmon fillet, skin on, pin bones removed**  
**3 Tbs. mirin (or 1 Tbs. sugar dissolved in 2 Tbs. hot water)**

**3 Tbs. Japanese dark soy sauce**  
**1 Tbs. vegetable oil**

Cut the salmon in half lengthwise and then crosswise into four rectangles. In a shallow dish large enough to hold the salmon, mix the mirin and soy sauce. Marinate the salmon in this mixture for 15 min. to 1 hour, turning it to coat both sides. Remove the salmon and pat it dry with paper towels. Reserve the marinade.

In a nonstick frying pan just large enough to accommodate the fish, heat the oil over high heat until it just begins to smoke. Put the salmon, skin side down, in the pan and immediately give the pan a shake to keep the salmon from sticking. With the back of a spatula, gently press down on each piece, moving from one to the other to keep the fil-

*Gentle pressure keeps skin-on fillets from curling. Use a spatula to press down on each piece.*





*A garlic-herb crust adds color and flavor to salmon fillets. These pieces were cut crosswise from the side of salmon. The thinner end of each strip was folded under for even cooking.*

Cook the steaks until just browned on one side, flip them, and brown the other side.

Remove the salmon from the pan; drain off the fat. In the same pan, cook the onion, carrots, and garlic over medium-high heat until soft and slightly golden, about 7 min. Add the wine and water to the pan to deglaze it. Put the salmon back in the pan, cover, and cook until done, another 10 to 12 min.

Remove the salmon from the pan, leaving the liquid and vegetables in the pan. If using medallions, remove the string and the skin. Taste the sauce and, if necessary, boil for a few minutes to reduce it to intensify its flavor. Add the cilantro and parsley to the sauce. Swirl in the butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Arrange the vegetables over the salmon and spoon the sauce over all.

### Baked Salmon with Garlic & Herb Crust

An herb crust adds flavor with none of the last-minute preparation that a sauce would entail. *Serves four.*

**1 large clove garlic, finely chopped  
2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh marjoram  
or 1 Tbs. dried  
4 Tbs. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley**

**3 Tbs. fresh breadcrumbs  
4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil; more for the pan  
1/2 tsp. salt**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

**1 1/2 lb. salmon fillet, skin and pin bones removed**

Heat the oven to 400°F. With the side of a chef's knife or in a mortar and pestle, crush the garlic to a paste. In a small mixing bowl, combine the crushed garlic with the marjoram, parsley, breadcrumbs, olive oil, and salt. Grind in a little black pepper and stir the mixture until you have a stiff paste.

Cut the fillet crosswise into four pieces. If necessary, tuck the thin end of each piece under so that the two ends of each fillet are of even thickness.

Lightly grease a baking pan with about 2 tsp. olive oil. Arrange the fillets on the pan with at least an inch of space around each. Bake the salmon for about 5 min. Remove the pan from the oven. With your fingers, spread the garlic-herb mixture on top of the fish. Finish baking the salmon, another 5 to 10 min.

*James Peterson, a contributing editor for Fine Cooking, teaches cooking across the country. His latest book is Fish & Shellfish (William Morrow, 1996.) ♦*

lets from curling. Cook the salmon over high heat until the skin side browns, about 3 min.

Carefully flip the fillets and cook the flesh side until it browns, about 2 min. Take the salmon out of the pan and put it (skin side down) on paper towels to remove some of the oil. Remove the pan from the heat, wipe it with a paper towel, and return it to the heat. Pour in the reserved marinade and boil it for about 20 seconds. Reduce the heat to a simmer. Return the salmon to the pan, skin side down. Cook until the marinade glazes the salmon skin, about 3 min. Don't burn the glaze. If you smell caramel as you cook the fish, add 1 Tbs. water to the pan. Turn the salmon over to glaze the flesh side and cook until done, 2 to 3 min. Serve the salmon skin side up.

### Braised Salmon Steaks with Cilantro

Use this as a master recipe and experiment with your own herb and vegetable combinations, such as thyme and fennel. *Serves four.*

**4 salmon steaks (about 1/2 lb. each)**

**2 Tbs. olive oil**

**1 onion, thinly sliced**

**3 medium carrots, peeled and sliced into thin rounds**

**2 cloves garlic, very finely chopped**

**3/4 cup dry white wine**

**3/4 cup water**

**2 Tbs. chopped cilantro**

**1 Tbs. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley**

**1 Tbs. butter**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

Remove the pin bones from the steaks. If you want, shape the steaks into medallions (see photos opposite). In a large nonstick frying pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat.



## Wine Choices

**Choose white or sherry for salmon's light, fresh flavors**



With the clean flavors in these recipes, white wines work best. For the salmon with a garlic-herb crust, I'd want a mildly herbal Sauvignon Blanc like Columbia Crest from Washington, or a crisp Oregon Pinot Gris such as Adelsheim or Elk Cove.

With the braised salmon steaks, Chardonnay will pro-

vide a bit more body. Rosemount from Australia is buttery and smooth, and its Semillon-Chardonnay blend has complex fruit flavors.

With the teriyaki, try a chilled fino sherry from Spain. Why sherry? Its dry, nutty flavor plays off the toasty, slightly sweet teriyaki. Lustau and Hartley & Gibson

make good fino sherries at a fair price. Or try Shaoxing rice wine from China, or a Japanese sake, both served warm. All three are a bit higher in alcohol, so beware the wallop.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine in the San Francisco Bay area.*

# Think Cabbage for Comforting Winter Meals

Stuffed with sausage, braised in wine, or tossed in a warm salad, cabbage tastes sweeter when it's cold outside

BY HUBERT KELLER



*Green cabbage, also called Dutch white, is ideal for coleslaws or warm salads.*



*Red cabbage has a pleasant, peppery flavor.*



*Savoy cabbage has a more mellow flavor when cooked.*

In Alsace, where I was born, cabbage is at the heart of many traditional cold-weather dishes. Until recently, it was the only green available in winter. Though I've had enough sauerkraut to satisfy me into old age, I never tire of other classic cabbage dishes: braised red cabbage made sweet and tart with apples and cider vinegar, or tender sausage-filled Savoy cabbage slowly cooked in a fragrant broth. Today, I live in San Francisco, where there are plenty of greens available all year long, but come winter, I'm still partial to cabbage. For me, it recalls warming family meals and the good, simple life.

## THREE KINDS OF CABBAGE, ALL BEST IN WINTER

Green, red, and Savoy cabbage are the basic types of European cabbages, and they're the ones I'm featuring here. All can be eaten raw, but they're often easier on the palate and for digestion when cooked.

Steaming, braising, and stir-frying are wonderful ways to prepare cabbage. Boiling, however, is not. Too often the cabbage is overcooked until it becomes a limp, sulfurous mess.

Green cabbage, also called Dutch white, is firm and round, with smooth, tight leaves. It's good raw, as in coleslaw, and cooked, as in braises or soups. Red cabbage is actually a striking pinkish purple; its pleasant peppery flavor is wonderful in salads, braises, and stews. Beautiful Savoy cabbage has



crinkled, deeply veined green leaves that are pretty when stuffed. Cooked Savoy cabbage has a more mellow flavor than red or green cabbage.

One variety or another of leafy cabbage is available year-round, but cabbage's flavor is enhanced by cold weather, which turns the starch in the plant to sugar, making the vegetable sweeter.

**Choose cabbage that feels hard and heavy for its size.** The leaves should be tightly curled with no brown spots. If you plan to stuff the cabbage, avoid those whose leaves have small cracks, a result of rough handling. If you're going to chop or shred the cabbage, you needn't be quite as picky. If you plan to

**Prepare  
the  
cabbage  
to suit  
the dish**



*When you want whole leaves for stuffing, cut out the conical core whole with a sharp knife.*

Photos at far left: Scott Phillips; above: Mark Thomas.



*This warm red and green cabbage salad with cumin and sherry vinegar combines wonderful textures and flavors. Whole cumin seeds not only add flavor but are also said to aid digestion.*

Photos except where noted: Joanne McAllister Smart.

eat the cabbage raw, use it within a few days. If you're cooking it, you can keep it refrigerated for about two weeks (less for the more delicate Savoy).

#### CORING, SHREDDING, AND BLANCHING

To prepare cabbage, begin by throwing away any tough or discolored outer leaves. What you do next depends on how you're going to use it.

**Two ways to core cabbage.** Because the center of the cabbage is tough and woody, the core must be removed. When I want whole leaves, as for stuffed cabbage, I insert a sharp knife at the base of the cabbage and cut out the conical core (see photo oppo-

site). With the core removed, the leaves come off in one piece. If you don't need whole leaves, cut the cabbage in half from top to bottom to reveal the core and then simply cut it out (see center photo below).

**Shred the head for salads and braises.** To cut cabbage into julienne for salads and braises, slice the cored cabbage halves into lengths about  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick with a long, sharp vegetable knife. You can also shred cored cabbage in a food processor, but be careful not to cut it too fine or you'll end up with a mushy texture if you cook it.

**Blanching makes cabbage softer for salads and supple for stuffing.** I often blanch cabbage—



*A quick blanch softens cabbage, making it easier to stuff. Blanch shredded cabbage to soften it for salads.*



*If the cabbage will be chopped, sliced, or shredded, first slice the cabbage in half. Cut out the triangular core with a sharp knife.*



*You can shred cabbage in a food processor, but a knife gives you more control. For manageable lengths, cut the cabbage in quarters.*

# Use a cup to make perfectly round stuffed cabbage



*A coffee cup is the perfect size. Line the cup with a 12-inch square piece of plastic wrap, letting the excess hang over the edge. Line the plastic with a large cabbage leaf (or two overlapping smaller leaves). Pack in about 1/3 cup of stuffing and then fold the leaves over the stuffing.*



*Twist the plastic for a tight bundle. After pulling the plastic-wrapped cabbage out of the cup, the author holds the excess plastic in one hand and twists the stuffed cabbage in the other, stretching the plastic around the cabbage tighter and tighter.*



*A compact little globe. The leaves stay tightly closed after the plastic is removed.*

dropping it in boiling water and then into cold to stop the cooking process—to make it flexible enough to roll without cracking for stuffed cabbage or to make it slightly less crunchy for salad. For stuffed cabbage, I simmer the whole leaves until they're limp but not mushy. For a salad, I plunge shredded cabbage into the hot water for just about a minute. Braised cabbage doesn't need this preliminary step because it cooks for such a long time.

## Braised Cabbage with Apples & Pecans

I often make this dish with fresh chestnuts, but pecans are easier to find. Though this braise is easy to make, the cabbage has to cook for about two hours. You can do this ahead; before serving, reheat the cabbage, add the apples, and cook for another 10 minutes. *Serves six to eight.*

1 Tbs. cider vinegar

1 Tbs. sugar

1 1/2 tsp. salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 head red cabbage (about 1 1/2 lb.), cored and cut in thin strips

2 Tbs. butter

2 large Rome or Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, and cut in large chunks

2 Tbs. Calvados or brandy (optional)

1/2 cup vegetable oil

1 large onion, chopped

1/2 cup dry red wine

2 bay leaves

1/2 cup pecan halves, toasted

In a large bowl, mix the vinegar, sugar, salt, and pepper. Add the cabbage, toss well, and let marinate at room temperature, tossing occasionally, for about 20 min.

Meanwhile, in a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat, heat the butter and sauté the apples until slightly browned and caramelized, about 10 min. Add the Calvados. Remove from the heat; set aside.

In a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat, heat the oil; add the onion and cook until slightly browned and

caramelized, about 15 min. Add the cabbage and any liquid, the wine, and the bay leaves. Cover and cook gently; check occasionally to be sure nothing sticks to the pan. After 1 1/4 hours, add the apples to the pan. Cook for another 10 min. Check the seasoning; add salt and pepper if needed. Transfer to a serving platter and top with the toasted pecans.

## Red & Green Cabbage Salad with Cumin & Sherry Vinegar

You can make this salad with just red or green cabbage, but the contrast of colors looks great. Heated vinegar softens the cabbage's texture and helps the flavor penetrate. The components can be prepared up to three hours ahead and mixed at the last minute. *Serves six to eight.*

1/2 head red cabbage, cored and cut in thin strips

1/2 head green cabbage, cored and cut in thin strips

6 Tbs. sherry vinegar or red-wine vinegar

1/2 tsp. cumin seeds

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

4 thick slices bacon, cooked until crisp and crumbled

1 small carrot, peeled and finely diced

1 sweet apple, such as Golden or Red Delicious, peeled and finely diced (toss with a little lemon juice to prevent browning or cut just before adding to the salad)

3 Tbs. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

3 Tbs. walnut pieces, lightly toasted

1 Tbs. sugar

2 Tbs. olive oil

Bring about 6 qt. water to a full boil. Fill a large bowl with ice water. Add the green cabbage to the boiling water and blanch it for 1 min. With a slotted spoon, transfer the cabbage to the ice water to halt the cooking. Drain the cabbage well and set aside in another bowl. Repeat with the red cabbage using the same pot of boiling water. Set the red cabbage aside in a second bowl (so its color doesn't bleed into the green cabbage).

In a small saucepan, bring the vinegar to a boil. Pour half the vinegar over the green cabbage and toss well; repeat with the red cabbage. Divide the cumin seeds be-



*Individual-size servings of stuffed cabbage entice rather than overwhelm. The braising liquid doubles as a flavorful sauce.*

tween the two bowls of cabbage; season both with salt and pepper. Let the cabbage marinate about 20 min.

Drain the green cabbage and put it into a large mixing bowl. Drain the red cabbage and toss it with the green cabbage. Add the bacon, carrot, apple, parsley, toasted walnuts, sugar, and olive oil. Toss several times, taste for seasoning, and add salt, pepper, or vinegar if needed.

### Alsation Stuffed Cabbage

I like Aidells chicken-and-apple sausage, but any sausage will do. *Yields about 8 small stuffed cabbages to serve four.*

#### FOR THE STUFFING:

*3/4 lb. ground veal  
1/2 lb. sausage meat, removed from casing  
1/4 lb. lightly smoked bacon, finely chopped  
3 Tbs. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley  
6 medium shallots, finely chopped (about 3/4 cup)  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
1 cup fresh breadcrumbs  
2 eggs, lightly beaten  
1 dash ground nutmeg (freshly ground, if possible)  
1 1/2 tsp. salt; more to taste  
Freshly ground black pepper to taste*

#### FOR THE CABBAGE:

*1 head Savoy or green cabbage (about 3 lb.) or two smaller cabbages*

*2 Tbs. butter  
1 large onion, chopped  
1 large carrot, thinly sliced  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
1 cup white wine (preferably slightly sweet)  
2 cups homemade or low-salt canned vegetable, chicken, or beef stock; more if needed  
4 sprigs fresh thyme  
2 sprigs flat-leaf parsley  
1 bay leaf  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste*

**For the stuffing**—In a large bowl, combine the veal, sausage, bacon, parsley, shallots, garlic, breadcrumbs, eggs, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Mix well and refrigerate.

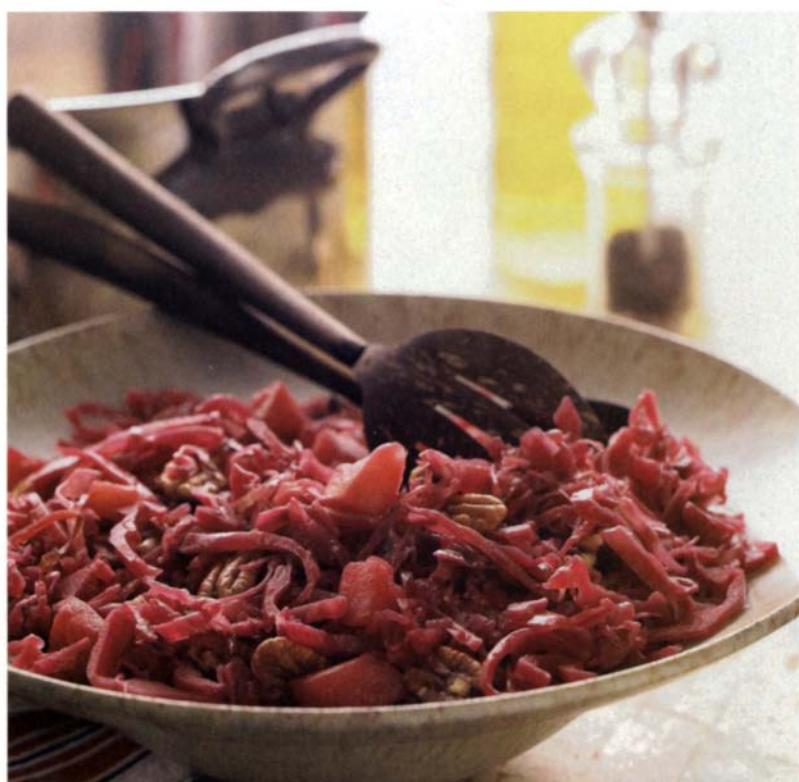
**To prepare the cabbage**—Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Fill a large bowl with ice water. Core the cabbage whole. Peel and discard any loose outer leaves. Separate the leaves, taking care to keep them intact. Plunge the leaves into the boiling water and boil them until they're limp but not mushy, 6 to 8 min. Drain the leaves and refresh them in the cold water. Spread the leaves to dry on an overturned bowl or on paper towels. Cut the stiff rib from the center of each leaf.

**Stuff the cabbage**—Follow the method shown opposite.

**Finish the dish**—Heat the oven to 350°F. In a heavy casserole, melt the butter on the stove over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, and garlic. Cover the casserole and cook until the vegetables are soft but not browned, about 5 min. Uncover, add the wine, stock, thyme, parsley, and bay leaf. Bring to a boil; cook until the liquid is reduced by about one-third. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Arrange the stuffed cabbages in the casserole side by side. Check that the broth covers at least the bottom third of the rolls. Cover the casserole and bake until the rolls are somewhat firm to the touch, 50 to 60 min. Serve with a little broth to moisten them.

*Braised cabbage makes a great side dish for hearty meats. Toasted pecans add a little crunch.*

*Hubert Keller is chef/owner of Fleur de Lys in San Francisco and the author of The Cuisine of Hubert Keller (Ten Speed Press, 1996). ♦*



# Baking French Bread at Home

Craft chewy loaves with the crispest crust using the right flours and good shaping technique

BY MAGGIE GLEZER

I think of French bread as the Mount Everest of baking. Getting the characteristic crisp, mahogany-colored crust and lacy interior isn't an insurmountable challenge, but to make authentic French bread, you do need good technique and a well-formulated recipe.

Of the many styles of French bread, a good one to start with is *pain paysan*, or peasant bread. This bread is molded into a *bâtarde*, which means

hybrid—in this case, between a round and a long shape. *Bâtarde*s are relatively easy to master and can fit comfortably into home ovens, unlike longer, unwieldy baguettes.

One of the few darker French breads, *pain paysan* always includes some whole-wheat flour. A high proportion of a French starter called *pâte fermentée*, or fermented dough, gives the bread its rich flavor. The dough itself is made using a fairly standard

method, including a special resting period called an *autolyse* (pronounced ah-toh-LEEZ), but it's slightly wet and will take some getting used to.

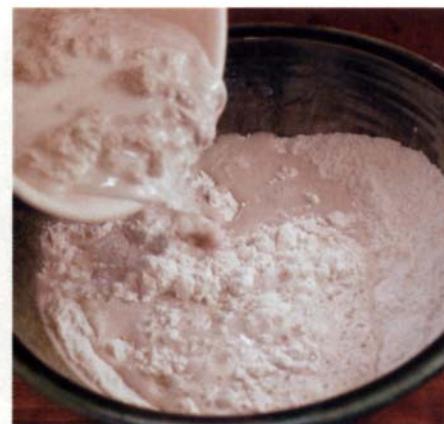
To seasoned home bakers, my method may seem quirky. I don't use flour when I knead, I punch the dough down early, and my shaping method is detailed. But all these tricks help you end up with an expansive, deeply flavored loaf with a dark, crisp crust.



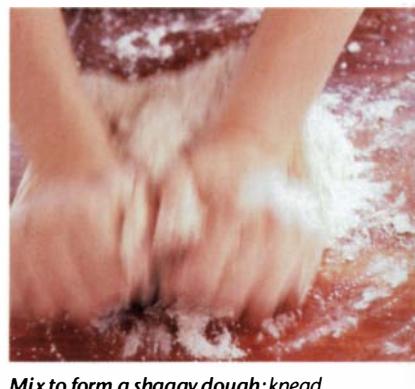
## Mix a starter, assemble the dough, and give it a rest



*Mix the starter 12 to 24 hours before making the bread. Stir the flours, yeast, and water together to make a shaggy dough. Turn it onto an unfloured surface and knead a few times, just until you can shape a ball. Put it in a jar, seal it, and leave it at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours.*



*To make the dough, combine the bread flour, yeast, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Put the water in another bowl, break up the starter in the water, and add it to the flour mixture.*



*Mix to form a shaggy dough; knead just until it starts to smooth out. It will still be soft and sticky, so use a spatula or scraper. Cover the dough with a bowl and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes. This rest is called an autolyse.*



## Knead the dough and test for doneness



*After the autolyse, knead the dough on an unfloured surface until it's smooth, strong, and firm, 15 to 20 minutes, using a scraper if needed. The dough is right when it stands up pertly and sticks to itself when you fold it in half. One that's too wet will quickly spread out.*



*To see if kneading is done, stretch a chunk of dough into a "gluten window." It should be thin and translucent, with flakes of bran embedded in it—a few holes are all right. Shape the dough into a ball, put it in a clean bowl, dust the top with flour, and cover it well with plastic wrap.*

*Serve this crusty, flavorful peasant loaf sliced, not ripped, to reveal its lacy interior.*

## USE FLOURS WITH THE PROPER AMOUNT OF PROTEIN

You'll need two types of flour for this recipe. The unbleached bread flour you'll find in the supermarket can make good French bread and is usually the right protein content, about 12%. The bag's side panel should read 4 grams of protein per  $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup serving (see p. 56 for flour sources).

You'll also need a whole-wheat flour with at least 15% protein. The package should read 5 grams per  $\frac{1}{4}$ -cup serving. If you can't find this type of flour in the supermarket, try a health-food store. Buy whole-wheat flour that's as fresh as possible and keep it in an airtight container in the refrigerator or freezer. (You don't need to do this with white flour.)

## KNEAD ON AN UNFLOURED SURFACE AND GIVE THE DOUGH A SHORT REST

Breadmaking isn't difficult, but it requires practice. Don't be afraid to touch the dough all throughout the process—especially during the final proof—to get acquainted with its changing consistency. Each time you bake, think about what you did with the dough and compare it to the finished bread.

**Begin your starter a day ahead of time**, and let it ferment for at least 12 hours but for no more than 24. If you can't use the starter immediately, seal it and refrigerate it—it will keep for at least a week. When you're ready to continue, you can use the starter cold, straight out of the fridge.

**Don't use extra flour on your work surface when kneading the dough.** Extra flour can make the dough too stiff. During the first knead especially, this dough will be sticky, so use a spatula or scraper to help you. Knead just until the dough starts to smooth out.

**After the first knead, give the dough a rest**, called an *autolyse*, which will make the dough stronger and more extensible without any work on your part. Just cover the dough with a bowl or sheet of plastic and let it sit for about 15 minutes.

**Before you finish the final knead, look for proper consistency.** Dough with the right amount of water sticks to itself when folded in half and stays pert when

## Ferment the dough and punch it down early



*Let the dough ferment in the rising bowl for 10 minutes and then punch it down. To do this, dust the dough with flour and press it very flat with your hands, popping air bubbles as you encounter them. Take care not to rip it.*



*Fold the left, top, right, and bottom edges of the dough into the middle.*



*Fold it in half again to form a very tight bundle. Return it to its rising bowl, covered, to ferment for 10 minutes; repeat the punching and folding.*

left alone for a minute. Dough that's too wet will spread quickly; one that's too dry won't stick to itself. If it's too wet and feels way too soft and sticky, work in a tablespoon or two of flour; if it's too dry, work in a tablespoon or two of water.

A dough that's too wet makes coarse-textured bread with a spread-out shape and a slash that's poorly opened and flat, instead of wide open and deeply creviced. A dough that's too dry makes heavy bread that won't expand as much when it bakes.

## A GLUTEN WINDOW TELLS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DONE KNEADING

The gluten window (see p. 53) is one of the best tests to tell if you've kneaded



*Return the dough to its rising bowl, cover it, and let it continue to ferment for another 10 to 25 minutes (longer if your kitchen is cold), until it has risen just slightly. It should not double. Total fermentation time will be about 45 minutes.*

enough and to check the dough's consistency. A well-kneaded dough with the right consistency makes a gluten window that's phyllo-dough thin and translucent, with flakes of bran embedded in it. A few holes are all right as long as you get a nice, clear window. Dough that's insufficiently kneaded makes a gluten window that's opaque in spots and won't pull into a thin sheet. Dough that's too dry makes a window that tears and resists stretching.

When you've finished kneading, the dough is ready for fermentation (what bakers call the rise before the dough is shaped; after shaping, the rise is called a proof). Once fermenting begins, handle the dough gently so you don't rip or tear it.

**Early into the fermentation, punch down the dough to strengthen and degas it.** Bakers typically do this after the dough has doubled in bulk, but I find that early punching makes for better volume and a pleasantly irregular texture.

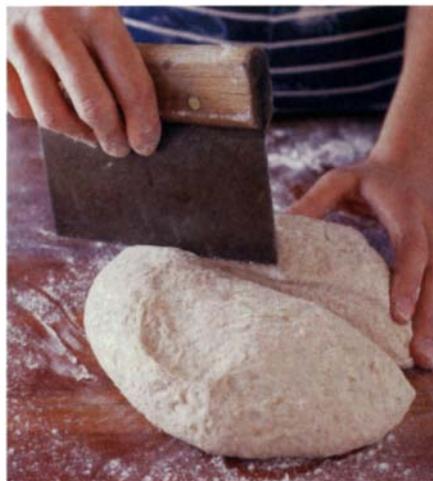
#### SHAPING AND BAKING TO GET A TRUE FRENCH CRUST AND CRUMB

A well-formed *bâtant* must be tightly shaped so that there's a strong, unripped skin enclosing it (see photos p. 56). The bread must be well bonded, because it will expand as it proofs, putting high stress on the seals you'll be making. With shaping, you're creating tension over the dough's surface so that it will just about pop open when slashed with the razor.

**Support the dough as it proofs to preserve its shape.** One way to do this is with a linen-lined basket, called a *baneton*. I also like a method that uses a piece of raw linen called a *couche*. You can buy a professional *couche*, pick up a piece of raw linen at a fabric store, or use a kitchen towel. Roll each end of the cloth into a bolster (you won't need to flour raw linen, but if you're using a kitchen towel, flour it heavily). Prop one bolster against a wall and fold a deep pleat in the center to make two troughs. Brace the other bolster with something long and heavy, like a glass baking pan.

**Use a hot baking stone and bake the bread to a deep brown** to get true French flavor and a crust that stays crisp after cooling. Serve the bread sliced, not ripped, to reveal its lacy interior. This bread freezes beautifully, so if you're not going to eat it

## Cut the dough in half to shape two loaves

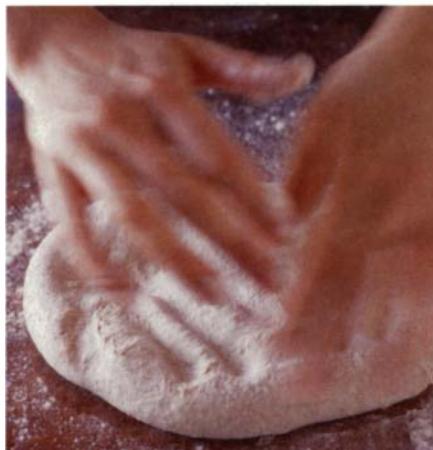


When the fermenting is done, cut the dough into two equal pieces.



Flip the dough onto its cut side and gently stretch the skin over each piece, rounding it into a ball. Try not to deflate the dough. Cover with plastic and let stand until soft, about 10 minutes.

## Start the shaping by folding the dough



Lay the dough skin side down on a very lightly floured work surface. Press it flat, degassing as much as possible—air bubbles make a *bâtant* lumpy.



Fold the bottom edge over, then the top edge down, just as you would fold a business letter. Press your palms on the folds to seal them.



Press a crease across the middle of the dough from end to end.



Fold over the top edge of the dough past the bottom edge, creating a narrow cylinder.

## Shape the dough into a tightly formed bâtant



*Push the edge away from you, forcing the dough to curl up and tighten (you may need to move to an unfloured area to get the work surface to grip the dough during this last step).*



*With the heel of your hand floured, seal the seam that now runs lengthwise down the cylinder, pushing very hard to seal it completely.*



*Place your palms on the ends, angle them slightly, and roll back and forth until the ends are well tapered and the center is plump. Repeat with the second piece of dough. Set the loaves in a couche.*

within eight hours, let it cool thoroughly, seal it in plastic bags, and freeze it.

### Pain Paysan (Peasant Bread)

Amounts for flours are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons); use either measurement. Yields two loaves.

#### FOR THE STARTER:

6 oz. (1 cup plus 2 Tbs.) whole-wheat flour  
1 oz. (3 Tbs. plus 2 tsp.) unbleached bread flour  
 $\frac{1}{16}$  tsp. instant active dry yeast (QuickRise, Rapid-Rise, or Fleischmann's Bread Machine yeast)  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup plus 1 Tbs. water

#### FOR THE FINAL DOUGH:

14 oz. (3 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached bread flour; about 1 oz. more, if needed  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. instant active dry yeast (see brands above)  
 $2\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. salt  
1 cup water; up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup more, if needed

For the procedure, follow the photos starting on p. 52.

#### EQUIPMENT AND FLOUR BY MAIL

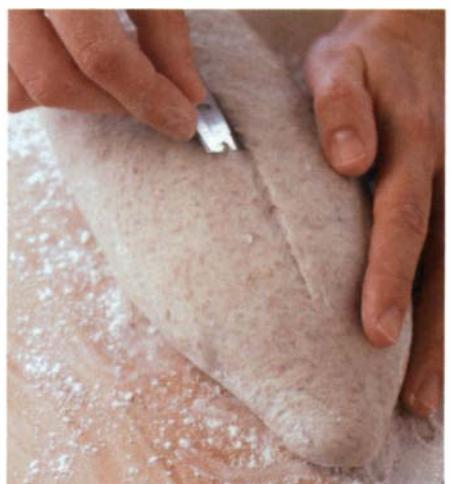
- The cheapest and best source for *couches* and *bannetons* is a professional equipment supplier that happily sells to home bakers: French Baking Machines, 609/860-0577; fax, 609/860-0576.
- My current favorite flours for homemade French bread are Giusto's Baker's Choice organic unbleached white flour, and Giusto's whole-wheat high-protein medium-grind spring wheat flour. Order them from Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods, 503/654-3215; fax, 503/653-1339.
- A good all-around source for equipment and flour is the *King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue*, 800/827-6836.

Maggie Glezer bakes her bâtant in Atlanta, where she teaches and writes about breadmaking. ♦

## Proof the dough and prepare it for baking



*Proof the loaves in the couche for about 2 hours. When they've risen to three times their size and feel soft, press them gently with your finger. If the indentation fills up slowly, they're ready to bake. Forty-five minutes before baking, heat the oven to 450°F and set a baking stone in the top third of the oven. Flour a peel or other flat, rimless sheet.*



*Gently roll each loaf from the couche to the peel, seam side down and make one long, shallow slash (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch deep) with a razor, down the length of the dough. Dough that's well shaped and properly proofed will almost burst when slashed.*

## Bake the loaves on a hot stone

*Slide the loaves from the peel onto the hot baking stone, parallel to the sides of the oven. Spritz the bread generously with water. Bake the loaves for 20 minutes without opening the oven, and then rotate them and bake 10 to 20 minutes more until they're a rich, dark caramel. If the loaves get too dark after half an hour, reduce the oven temperature to 425° and continue to bake for 10 minutes more. Cool on a rack.*



# For a Delicious Cake, Turn It Upside Down

Buttermilk makes a tender cake crumb;  
caramel and fruit make it tangy-sweet

BY MARGERY K. FRIEDMAN

**W**hen most people think of upside-down cake, the standard version comes to mind: tons of melted butter and brown sugar and, most likely, canned pineapple rings. I was raised on the stuff, and the memories are sweet. Recently, though, I craved something a little lighter than that childhood treat. I envisioned perfectly caramelized fresh fruit atop a slice of tender buttermilk cake. I experi-

mented with different fruits and sugar mixtures, and my fantasy came true.

#### BUTTERMILK ADDS A SUBTLE TANG

I love using buttermilk in cakes—the subtle tang and tender crumb are so appealing. The secret lies in buttermilk's acid, which tenderizes flour's gluten. Using nonfat buttermilk cuts the fat somewhat and



*A crown of caramelized fresh pineapple atop tender buttermilk cake is a light, new take on an old favorite.*



*When the caramel turns light amber, take it off the stove right away. The caramel will continue to cook by itself off the heat.*



*You're creating the cake's top as you arrange the fruit slices, so overlap them attractively, flat edge up.*

still produces a moist cake, but if it isn't available where you shop, you'll get great results with regular buttermilk, or by adding lemon juice to whole or 2% milk—1 teaspoon per cup.

#### CHOOSE FRESH, RIPE FRUIT

To find a perfect pineapple, smell the core; if it has a faint sweetness and gives slightly when pressed, it's probably a good one. While a sweet pineapple is its own reward, a dash of dark rum on the baked cake just before serving is delicious. Pineapple is the classic fruit choice for upside-down cake, especially at this time of year, but apples, pears, or bananas are also delicious in this recipe. Once you've chosen

your fruit, you can add your own touches with spices (see the sidebar opposite).

#### CARAMEL NEEDS A CLOSE WATCH

The transformation of sugar into caramel is a glorious one. Here's how to ensure success:

- ◆ Use a heavy, wide-based pan with a tight-fitting lid and a sturdy handle. Boiling sugar can be scary: when you lift a pan of boiling syrup, pay attention and use a steady grip.
- ◆ Once you stir the water and sugar together and have begun to heat it, don't stir it again. Swirl the pan gently to make sure that the sugar has dissolved before the syrup comes to a full boil. When the syrup

## For uniform pieces, quarter a pineapple and slice it crosswise



*Remove the strip of core. Hold the knife almost parallel to the cutting board and cut just below the core.*



*Separate the fruit from the rind. Again, hold the knife almost parallel to the cutting board and cut between the rind and the fruit.*



*Slice the fruit crosswise into 1/4-inch wedges.*



*Spoon the batter over the fruit gently so you don't disturb your handiwork.*

begins to boil, cover the pan to let the condensation wash stray sugar crystals down the sides of the pan. Undissolved sugar can turn a beautiful caramel into a grainy mess.

♦ When the caramel has turned light amber, remove it from the heat immediately. Don't talk yourself into leaving it on the heat for "just another minute"—the hot caramel will continue to cook by itself off the heat.

#### SAVE TIME BY MAKING THE CARAMEL AHEAD

The caramel can be made the night before; let it cool thoroughly in the prepared cake pan and cover it loosely until you're ready to use it. You can even refrigerate an assembled, unbaked upside-down cake for two to three hours before baking.

#### Pineapple Upside-Down Cake

This cake is terrific warm, and it's mighty good cold, too. Amounts for flour and butter are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups or tablespoons); use either measurement. *Serves eight.*

##### FOR THE CARAMEL:

4 Tbs. water  
1 cup sugar

##### FOR THE FRUIT:

1 large, ripe pineapple

##### FOR THE CAKE:

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened  
1 cup sugar  
2 eggs, at room temperature  
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract  
7 oz. (1 1/2 cups) unsifted all-purpose flour  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1/4 tsp. salt  
1/2 cup nonfat buttermilk

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 9-inch square or round cake pan and set it on a heatproof surface.

**Make the caramel**—In a heavy saucepan with a tight-fitting lid, stir the water and sugar together. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, swirling occasionally. Cover the pan for about 4 min. so the condensation washes down any sugar crystals from the sides of the pan. Uncover and boil for about 12 min. (the bubbles will be large) or until it turns light amber. Remove from the heat and immediately pour the caramelized syrup into the prepared cake pan. Be careful: the syrup will be very hot. Allow the caramel to cool; it will set up within 5 min.

**Prepare the fruit**—Cut off the top of the pineapple and cut a slice from the bottom so it will stand upright and then quarter it. Core, peel, and slice the pineapple as shown in the photos opposite. Arrange the slices on the hardened caramel, overlapping them, with flat edges up. Remember that this will be the top of the cake (see the sidebar at right for other fruit preparations).

**Assemble the cake**—With an electric mixer, cream the butter. Gradually add the sugar, beating until the mixture is light. Add the eggs one at a time, beating for about 15 seconds to incorporate each. Add the vanilla extract.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. With the mixer on low speed, add half of the dry ingredients to the butter mixture and mix just until the flour disappears. Add the buttermilk and mix again. Add the remaining flour, mixing just until the flour disappears. Spoon large dollops of the batter over the sliced fruit, taking care not to disturb the arranged fruit slices. Smooth out the batter.

Bake the cake until a skewer stuck in the center comes out clean and the top of the cake is a deep golden color, about 50 min. Remove the cake from the oven and run a knife between the cake and the pan. Set a serving platter upside down on top of the cake pan, invert the platter and the pan, and let them rest for 4 to 5 min. to allow the caramelized fruit to settle onto the cake. Gently lift the pan from the cake and serve.

*Margery Friedman is a cake designer, pastry chef, and food writer who lives in Rockville, Maryland. ♦*



*Set your serving platter on the cake pan and then flip the pan and platter over. Let the caramelized fruit settle for a few minutes before gently removing the pan.*

#### BE CREATIVE WITH OTHER FRESH, RIPE FRUIT

Why limit yourself to pineapple? Other fruits are also delicious on this cake.



**Pears**—About five firm, ripe ones of any variety will do. If you like, lightly sprinkle the slices with cinnamon or cardamom.

**Apples**—I like Golden Delicious, which hold their shape and have a lemony sweetness. You'll need about five. The slices will be more even if you cut them crosswise. Again, I like a sprinkle of cardamom or cinnamon for apples.

**Bananas**—You'll need four or five long, ripe bananas (or six or seven smaller ones), sliced 1/2 inch thick on a gentle diagonal. A sprinkling of nutmeg is particularly good with bananas.

# Cook to Perfection with an Instant-Read Thermometer

From inexpensive dial models to digital probes, thermometers give you more control over your cooking

BY TONI LYDECKER

I'm an experienced cook, so I often rely on touch, smell, and sight to tell me when food is done rather than reaching for a thermometer. But there are times when that habit backfires, and I'm faced with an unpleasant surprise—a lasagna that's nicely browned on top but tepid on the inside, or a roast that's bordering on blue rather than rosy.

An instant-read thermometer eliminates guess-work in cooking. Beyond checking a roast for doneness, a good thermometer can help you find the right temperature for proofing yeast or tempering chocolate. It comes in handy when you want to ensure that your burgers are medium or well done. And choosing a thermometer is easy, with instant-reads now widely available to home cooks.

## DIAL THERMOMETERS: INEXPENSIVE AND ACCURATE

Pocket dial-style thermometers (sometimes called bi-therms) have become popular over the last several years. These instant-reads perform well, they're easy to use, and they don't cost much—less than \$15, even for the best quality.

Inside a dial thermometer is a coil of two wires that expand and contract at different rates, moving

the pointer. The number on the dial is an average of temperatures registered from the tip of the stem to a point about two inches up. Because the dial thermometer must be inserted deeply and can take as long as twenty seconds to react, it may give inaccurate readings for foods that are thin or small in mass, or that cook quickly. This type of thermometer is also fragile and can malfunction when dropped or jarred.

**Make sure your dial thermometer can be recalibrated.** Thermometers sometimes "drift" from an accurate reading, but only some models can be recalibrated. On the stem just under the dial face, the thermometer must have a movable hexagonal nut. Inferior models have a look-alike hex nut that's fixed and therefore useless.

To find out if your thermometer needs to be recalibrated, hold it two inches into boiling water; it

*Good-quality pocket dial thermometers cost less than \$15.*



*Easy-to-read digital thermometers have a range from -58° to 300°.*

## Using an instant-read thermometer like a pro

♦ Estimate cooking time by checking the food's internal temperature before you cook it. Whether the food is 35° or 55°F will make a difference in cooking time.

♦ Measure food temperatures in several spots, especially if you're using a tip-sensitive digital thermometer that gives a spot temperature, not an average. Rotate food in the oven if it isn't cooking evenly.

♦ Remember that temperatures may rise as much as 25° after food is removed from the heat. To avoid overcooking, you may need to take food out of the oven or off the burner before it reaches the target temperature.

should read 212°F. If it doesn't, grip the hex nut with pliers or a small wrench and twist the face of the dial until it reads 212°F. Or test your thermometer in an icy slurry (made by churning a cup of ice cubes with a cup of water in a blender); it should read 32°F.

#### DIGITAL THERMOMETERS: VERSATILE AND EASY TO READ

At \$15 to \$30, the digital thermometer is a slightly more expensive alternative to the dial type. The biggest advantage of a digital model is that it has an electronic sensor near the tip that gives an accurate reading when inserted only half an inch into food. Figures on a digital thermometer are also wonderfully legible.

**Digital thermometers have a broader temperature range than the dial models.** A digital ranges from -58° to 300°F, compared to a dial thermometer, which ranges from 0° to 220°F. Digital thermometers don't register temperature changes significantly faster or more accurately than dial thermometers. It's easier to tell when a digital thermometer goes haywire, however; instead of drifting a few degrees one way or the other, it usually fails completely. Recalibration is not an option. Unless the problem is a failing battery, the thermometer must be replaced.

**Digital and dial instant-reads can be destroyed by prolonged exposure to heat.** While pocket thermometers are very handy, they aren't meant to be left in the oven. An alternative, made by Polder, is a \$30 digital thermometer with a separate probe



*Instant-read dial thermometers make it quick and easy to check the temperature of everything from melted chocolate to roasted chicken.*

that remains in the food as it cooks. A thin wire snakes through the oven door, connecting the probe with a temperature/timer display unit that magnetically sticks to the outside of your oven door or sits on the kitchen counter. I used this thermometer to roast a chicken, and I loved the temperature readout, which was so large that I could see it half-way across the kitchen. The only drawbacks are that you can't use it in an oven that's hotter than 400°F—and, of course, you can't clip it to your pocket.

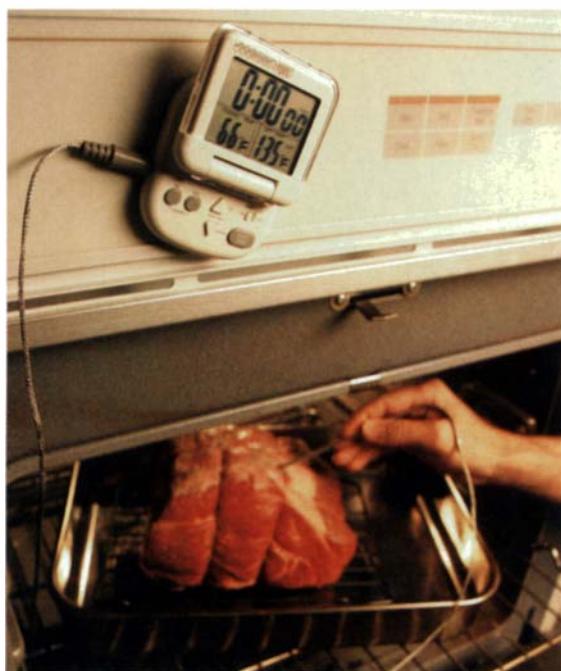
#### THERMOCOUPLE THERMOMETERS:

##### THE TOP OF THE LINE

The latest high-tech thermometer is equipped with thermocouple sensors and probes with different tips for specific foods. The thermocouple thermometer can measure temperatures up to 500°F, and it can quickly and accurately measure just about anything, from a blueberry to a lettuce leaf, provided you have the right probe. Thermocouple thermometers are found mostly in restaurant-supply stores and catalogs; unfortunately, they cost around \$125 (including one or two probes). When manufacturers modify the design and the price, the thermocouple will be more practical for home use.

#### CHOOSING AN INSTANT-READ

If I had to choose just one instant-read thermometer, it would be a high-quality pocket digital. I like reading the temperature at a glance, and the tip sensor permits reasonably accurate readings even for shallow liquids and thin foods such as steaks or chicken breasts. And I can use it for quick accuracy checks. Recently, I was puzzled when a pork roast I was cooking had reached the required temperature an hour sooner than expected. I used my pocket digital to find out whether my traditional meat thermometer was telling the truth. It was, and thanks to that information, I dined on meat that was roasted to perfection.



*This digital thermometer from Polder is a great choice for long-cooking roasts. A thin wire connects the probe in the food to the display unit. An alarm sounds when the food reaches a set temperature.*

#### THERMOMETER SOURCES

*The Taylor Bi-Therm Dial Thermometer (#5989), the Taylor Pocket Digital Thermometer (#9840), and the Polder Cooking Thermometer are available from the following sources.*

##### By mail order:

Williams-Sonoma,  
PO Box 7456,  
San Francisco, CA  
91420-7456;  
800/541-2233.  
Chef's Catalog,  
3215 Commercial  
Ave., Northbrook, IL  
60062-1900;  
800/338-3232.

##### From the manufacturers:

Taylor, PO Box 1349,  
Fletcher, NC 28732;  
704/684-5178.  
Polder, 8 Slater St.,  
Port Chester, NY  
10573; 914/937-8200.

Toni Lydecker writes and cooks in Irvington, New York. She's working on a cookbook for Lake Isle Press. ♦

*"Pot-sticker" dumplings  
are addictive. Serve  
them with a tangy soy  
dipping sauce and  
watch them disappear.*



# Fun-to-Make Chinese Dumplings

Fold and cook these tasty take-out favorites  
with friends and family

BY LILY LOH

**D**umplings are as popular in China as pizza is in America. But while not every American knows how to make a pizza from scratch, almost everybody in China knows how to make dumplings.

Why are dumplings so popular? Because these little meat- or vegetable-filled bundles of dough, which are fried, boiled, or steamed and then dipped in a tangy sauce, are great fun to eat. They make wonderful appetizers and are always a part of festivities, especially the celebration of the Chinese New Year, which falls on February 7 this year.

At my house, we don't wait for a special occasion to make dumplings, and neither should you. They're very easy to make once you get the hang of folding the wrappers.

#### ENLIST HELP TO WRAP

Wrapping dumplings is one of those relaxing cooking chores that can't and shouldn't be rushed. It isn't difficult, but it does take a little time. I often have family or friends help out—the only way to speed things along.

Many people use store-bought wrappers, called gyoza or pot-sticker wrappers, but there's nothing like homemade dumpling dough. Its superiority is especially apparent when you steam dumplings; commercial wrappers can turn slippery and rubbery. I make the easy flour-and-water dough by hand (see recipe, p. 64), but you can use a food processor. Either way, it takes just minutes.

**Rounds of dough become the wrappers.** A good size is about 3 to 3½ inches across, which makes dumplings that can be eaten in two bites. The wrappers should be only about ½ inch thick in the middle and slightly thinner at the edges.

To make wrappers, you can roll the dough quite thin and stamp out rounds with a cookie cutter, or you can roll each round individually. I prefer the

Photos except where noted: Alan Richardson. Photo at right: Boyd Hagen



*Lily Loh sets up a steamer to cook dumplings.*

# Make the wrappers with a thinner edge so they fold better



*Individual pieces of dough are rolled to make flat rounds. You could also roll the dough flat and stamp out rounds with a cookie cutter, but then you'd have to reroll the scraps of dough.*



*Thinner edges make a better fold. Pinch the edges of the circle with your fingers to make them thinner.*



*A savory filling is at the heart of a dumpling. About 2 teaspoons of filling leaves room to press together the edges, which are first brushed with water.*

## COMMERCIAL WRAPPERS WORK IN A PINCH

Store-bought wrappers don't steam as well as homemade, but they are handy when you don't have the time to make the dough from scratch. You can find them in the refrigerated section of the grocery store, usually next to wonton wrappers and tofu in the produce section. Usually sold as pot-sticker wrappers or *gyoza*, the round wrappers are made of flour and water. You can refrigerate them or freeze them in a sealed bag. Defrost them thoroughly and bring them to room temperature before using; otherwise, the wrappers may crack and break.

latter method, which, after some practice, doesn't take much longer than using a cutter and doesn't leave you with scraps of dough to be rerolled.

I often use a Chinese rolling pin, which looks like a dowel that's thicker in the middle. I use the thicker part to press the edges of the dough so they're thinner than the middle. When I use a regular rolling pin, I pinch the edges of the round to make them thinner.

**Pleating the wrappers makes dumplings look good and gives them texture**—especially important to steamed dumplings. It isn't as crucial to pleat fried dumplings because frying gives them texture in a crisp coating, and because they're usually served with the unpleated (fried) side up. But pleats do make the pale side look prettier. It's easier to explain how to pleat the wrappers with pictures; see the illustrations opposite.

## STEAM FOR DELICACY, FRY FOR CRUNCH

Chinese dumplings have different names depending on how they're cooked. In Mandarin, pan-fried dumplings are called *guo tie*, which means "pot stickers." Pot stickers are crunchy on the outside and juicy inside. I cook them in a nonstick pan; otherwise, they live up to their name. A cast-iron pan is traditional, but you'll need more oil to keep the dumplings from sticking. Steamed dumplings are called *cheng jiao*; they're especially suited to delicately flavored vegetable fillings.

## MAKE LOTS AND FREEZE FOR THE FUTURE

Don't be afraid of making too many dumplings; people can eat plenty in one sitting. You can also freeze uncooked dumplings. Arrange them on a tray in a single layer and seal them with plastic. You don't need to defrost dumplings before cooking: just cook them a few minutes longer than usual. Once you try

them, you'll always want a batch in the freezer for a quick, delicious meal that's fun to make and to eat.

## Dumpling Dough

If the dough feels stiff, add a little more water a tablespoon at a time, but don't exceed  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup total. Yields 48 three-inch wrappers.

**2 cups all-purpose flour  
1/2 cup cold water**

Sift the flour into a bowl. Gradually add the water, mixing with a wooden spoon until a shaggy dough forms. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface; knead until smooth and springy, about 5 min. Put the dough in a clean bowl, cover it with a towel, and let it rest at room temperature for 20 min.

Put the rested dough on a lightly floured surface and knead it for 2 min. Divide the dough and shape each half into a 12-inch-long cylinder that's about 1 inch in diameter. With a serrated knife, cut each cylinder crosswise into 24 rounds. Lay the rounds on a lightly floured surface and flatten with the palm of your hand to about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick. Sprinkle flour lightly on the pieces to prevent sticking. With a rolling pin, roll each slice into a 3-inch circle about  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick. Pinch the edges of the rounds to make them thinner than the middle. Arrange the rounds in a single layer on a lightly floured tray or baking sheet and cover with a towel.

Fill each wrapper with about 2 tsp. filling (recipes opposite). Wrap them following the directions at right. Cook them according to the directions that follow. Serve with Ginger & Scallion Dipping Sauce (recipe opposite).

**For fried dumplings**—In a 12-inch nonstick pan, heat 1 Tbs. cooking oil over medium-low heat. Arrange the dumplings in the pan, pleated side up, starting from the center and radiating out, with the sides of the dumplings just touching. Cook the dumplings until the bottoms are lightly browned, about 10 min. Add 1 cup of water or chicken stock; cover the pan and cook over medium heat until all the liquid has evaporated, about 10 min. Uncover and drizzle 1 Tbs. oil around the inside

edge of the pan. Fry the dumplings until the bottoms are golden brown, about 3 min. Loosen the dumplings around the edges with a spatula, and then set a large serving plate over the pan. Wearing mitts to protect your hands, quickly invert the pan. Serve the dumplings fried side up.

**For steamed dumplings**—Arrange the dumplings, pleated side up and not touching, on a bamboo steamer lined with cheesecloth or wilted cabbage leaves. Fill a wok or a large pot with 2 inches of water and bring the water to a boil. Cover the steamer and set it on the wok. Steam over high heat for 15 min. Serve the dumplings in the bamboo steamer set on a large plate to catch any water that might drip. If you don't have a bamboo steamer, you can steam the dumplings on a greased, heatproof plate. Set the plate over a steam rack in the wok or a large pot. Be sure there's enough space around the edge of the plate to allow the steam to rise and circulate freely.

## Meat & Cabbage Filling

You can vary this filling by substituting ground beef, chicken, turkey, or veal for the pork, and spinach, scallions, or bok choy for the cabbage. *Yields enough to fill 48 three-inch dumplings.*

**1 lb. lean ground pork**  
**2 Tbs. cold water**  
**1 Tbs. dry sherry**  
**1 Tbs. soy sauce**  
**1 Tbs. toasted sesame oil**  
**1 tsp. salt**  
**1 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger**  
**1/2 lb. Chinese cabbage, trimmed and finely chopped (about 2 cups)**

In a large bowl, combine the ground meat with the water, sherry, soy sauce, sesame oil, salt, and ginger. Add the cabbage and mix until thoroughly blended.

## Vegetable Filling

This delicately flavored filling works best in dumplings that are steamed. *Yields enough to fill 48 three-inch dumplings.*

**10 dried black or shiitake mushrooms**  
**4 Tbs. canola oil**  
**1/4 lb. fresh mushrooms, finely chopped**  
**1 Tbs. soy sauce**  
**2 Tbs. toasted sesame oil**  
**1 medium rib celery, trimmed, peeled, and finely chopped**  
**3/4 lb. bok choy or Chinese cabbage, trimmed and finely chopped**  
**1 tsp. finely chopped fresh ginger**  
**1 tsp. salt**  
**1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper**

Soak the dried mushrooms in warm water for 15 min.; drain. Cut off and discard the stems; finely chop the mushroom caps.

In a wok or large skillet, heat 2 Tbs. of the canola oil over medium-high heat. Add the dried and fresh mushrooms; stir-fry for about 2 min. Add the soy sauce and sesame oil; stir briefly. Remove the mushrooms and set aside. Pour the remaining oil in the wok. Add the celery, cabbage, and ginger; stir-fry for about 3 min. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in the cooked mushrooms. Remove the mixture from the wok; drain in a colander before wrapping.

## Ginger & Scallion Sauce

This is a perfect dipping sauce for dumplings. For the heartier meat-filled dumplings, try dipping them in a little chile sauce as well. *Yields about 1 1/2 cups.*

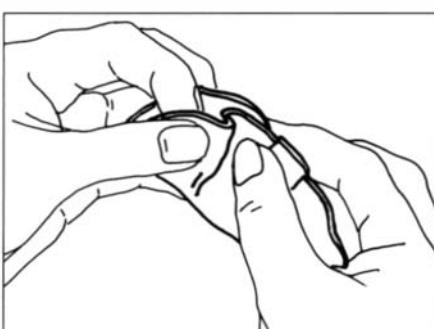
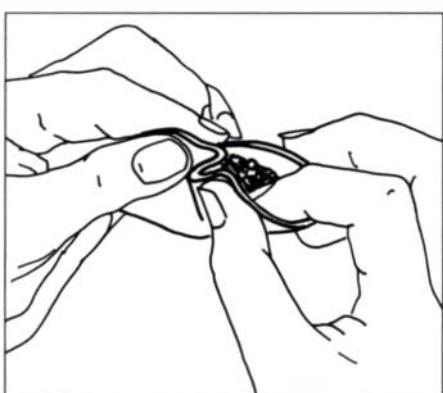
**4 Tbs. toasted sesame oil**  
**4 tsp. minced fresh ginger**  
**4 Tbs. minced scallion**  
**6 Tbs. soy sauce**  
**4 tsp. dark Chinese rice vinegar, light rice vinegar, or cider vinegar**  
**1/2 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**  
**2 tsp. sugar**

In a small saucepan, heat the oil over low heat. Add the ginger and scallion. Stir for a few seconds until fragrant. Add the remaining ingredients and bring to a boil. Serve at room temperature.

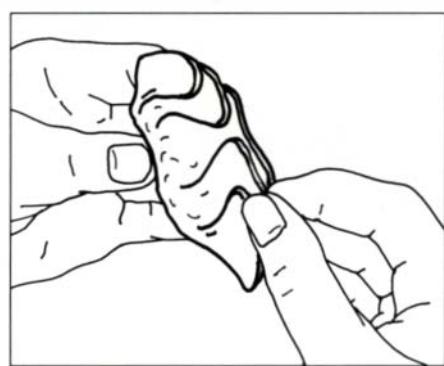


*A tangy soy-based sauce adds more flavor. This Ginger & Scallion Sauce enhances both meat- and vegetable-filled dumplings.*

*A pin in the middle keeps the two sides together. Make the pleats on one side only of the wrapper—the side nearest you.*



*Make two small pleats on either side of the pinched middle. To do this, gather the dough and fold it over onto itself. Point the pleats toward the middle of the dumpling.*



*Seal the pleated and unpleated sides by pinching along the top. The pleated dumpling curls naturally to make a half-moon that sits in the steamer.*

# Making Italy's Easy, Refreshing Lemon Liqueur

Simply steep vodka with lemon zest and sugar and then taste the citrusy zip of *limoncello* in desserts or on its own

BY JOANNE WEIR

**M**aking homemade liqueurs is a centuries-old tradition in the Mediterranean. It's part of a long-established ritual that includes good friends, conversation, food, and, of course, something refreshing to drink. As America's passion for Mediterranean foods continues to grow, these infused

spirits are becoming increasingly fashionable in the States.

My favorite of these drinks is the Italian *limoncello* (pronounced lee-mohn-CHEL-loh), which I first tasted on a visit to the town of Sorrento on the Amalfi coast. Our hostess brought to the table what looked like miniature martinis



Scrub your lemons with warm water and a brush to remove any wax or pesticide residue.



Strip the lemons with a vegetable peeler. You'll get long, wide strips of zest with little of the bitter white pith. Add the zest to half the vodka and wait.

glasses, all frosty and beaded with cold and filled with an icy cold, bright yellow liqueur. Sweet but not cloying, and pleasingly tart, *limoncello* captured my imagination. I'm grateful that my hostess was as generous with her recipe as she was with her *limoncello*, for it's really quite simple to make. Vodka, infused with lemon zest and sweetened with sugar syrup, is set to steep for eighty days. The infusion is then strained and bottled.

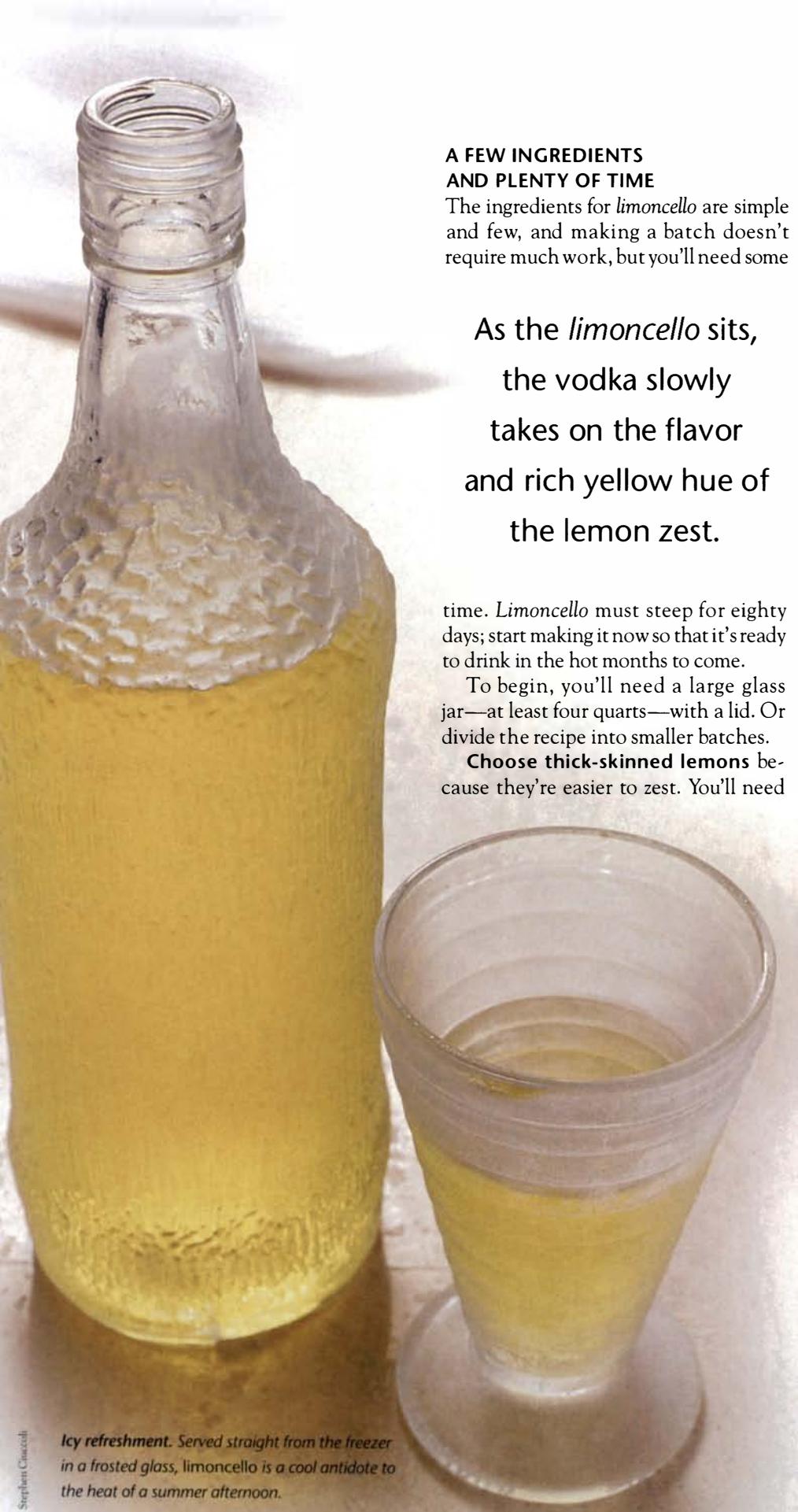
## DRINK *LIMONCELLO* STRAIGHT OR USE IT IN DESSERTS

*Limoncello* is remarkably versatile. I sometimes mix it with sparkling wine or mineral water and add a twist of lemon peel to serve as an apéritif. Or I use *limoncello* to flavor homemade granitas, sorbets, or ice cream.

Try tossing *limoncello* with blueberries and peaches and serving it over sweet biscuits for a summer shortcake. Or simply drizzle *limoncello* over store-bought sherbet or ice cream and serve it with a plain butter cookie or biscotto for a simple dessert. But my favorite way to enjoy *limoncello* is straight up, ice-cold from the freezer.



Forty days later, add the second bottle of vodka and the sugar syrup, give the mixture a stir, and let the *limoncello* sit for another forty days.



### A FEW INGREDIENTS AND PLENTY OF TIME

The ingredients for *limoncello* are simple and few, and making a batch doesn't require much work, but you'll need some

As the *limoncello* sits,  
the vodka slowly  
takes on the flavor  
and rich yellow hue of  
the lemon zest.

time. *Limoncello* must steep for eighty days; start making it now so that it's ready to drink in the hot months to come.

To begin, you'll need a large glass jar—at least four quarts—with a lid. Or divide the recipe into smaller batches.

**Choose thick-skinned lemons** because they're easier to zest. You'll need

about 15 medium to large fruits. Wash the lemons well with a vegetable brush and hot water to remove any residue of pesticides or wax. Pat the lemons dry and remove the zest. A vegetable peeler does the job best: it gives you long, wide strips of zest with hardly any of the bitter white pith. If you do get some of the pith with the zest, carefully scrape it away with the tip of a knife. Fill the jar with one bottle of the vodka and, as you remove the zest, add it to the jar.

***Limoncello* should taste like fresh lemons**, not poor-quality vodka. Use 100-proof vodka, which has less flavor than a lower proof one. Also, the higher alcohol level will ensure that the *limoncello* won't turn to ice in the freezer.

### MIX THE INGREDIENTS AND WAIT

After combining the vodka and lemon zest, cover the jar and store it at room temperature in a dark cabinet or cupboard. There's no need to stir: all you have to do is wait. As the *limoncello* sits, the vodka slowly takes on the flavor and rich yellow hue of the lemon zest.

After about forty days, combine the sugar and water in a saucepan, bring it to a boil, and cook until thickened, about five minutes. Let the syrup cool before adding it to the *limoncello* mixture, along with the other bottle of vodka. Cover and return to the cupboard for another forty days. Then simply strain the *limoncello* into bottles and discard the lemon zest. You can store the bottles in a cupboard, but always keep one in the freezer so it's icy cold when you're ready to drink it.

### Limoncello

Start your *limoncello* now, while lemons are plentiful and inexpensive. By the time it's ready, summer will be here and you'll have a freezer full of the perfect hot-weather refresher. *Yields 3 quarts.*

**15 thick-skinned lemons**  
**Two 750ml bottles 100-proof vodka**  
**4 cups sugar**  
**5 cups water**

For the procedure, see the text above.

Joanne Weir, a cooking teacher in San Francisco, writes regularly for the San Francisco Chronicle and is the author of *From Tapas to Meze: First Courses from the Mediterranean Shores* (Crown, 1994). ♦

*Icy refreshment. Served straight from the freezer in a frosted glass, limoncello is a cool antidote to the heat of a summer afternoon.*



# Light Fruit Soufflés

Italian meringue makes luscious, low-fat soufflés that are delicate yet stable enough to assemble ahead

BY LAURANN CLARIDGE

**T**here's something impressive about a soufflé—puffed and cloud-like, with just a hint of a wobble. But preparing a classic dessert soufflé can mean missing the entire main course in order to whisk up egg whites and then wait with all fingers crossed while the soufflé bakes.

Years ago, I stumbled across the technique of replacing the temperamental egg whites in a soufflé with the more stable, but equally airy, Italian meringue. The result: a high-rising soufflé that can be made ahead and baked at the last minute.

#### VIVID FRUIT FILLING BALANCES SWEET, AIRY MERINGUE

These soufflés have two parts: the meringue and a “surprise” center. The meringue provides the billowy volume and airy texture typical of a soufflé, while the fruit center delivers intense, concentrated flavor. The two elements are made separately and then layered in individual soufflé molds before baking to provide a delightful balance of texture and flavor.

*Pretty, delicious. These meringue-based soufflés are less temperamental than classic soufflés, but equally light and airy.*

# You Can Make Ahead

**Use fruit purée, curd, or sweetened berries as the fruit center;** I've even had great success with store-bought fruit preserves. Purées, curds, and other smooth-textured fillings give you a creamy, moist center, while individual berries provide more of a bright, fresh burst of flavor scattered throughout the soufflé. Either way, it's best to begin by preparing the fruit center and then setting it aside while you focus on the Italian meringue. With the exception of fresh berries, the filling should be spoonable, like jam, but not runny. Anything too thick won't mingle with the meringue, and anything too liquid will sink to the bottom.

**Flavor the meringue to match the fruit.** Adding fruit juice, liqueur, or zest to the sugar syrup in the standard Italian meringue recipe (see the sidebar below) gives it a backdrop of flavor to complement the fruit center. It also transforms the meringue from marshmallow white to lovely pastel shades that echo the flavors within. In the apricot-orange soufflé, for

example, apricot-flavored orange juice gives the meringue a sweet nectar flavor and a pale orange color.

## WHEN WHIPPING AN ITALIAN MERINGUE, TIMING IS KEY

Despite its name, Italian meringue is a staple in French dessert making. This type of meringue is fluffy, very glossy, and quite stable. The basic process is straightforward: whisk egg whites until stiff peaks form and then pour sugar syrup cooked to 248°F (hard-ball stage on a candy thermometer) onto the whites as you continue to whisk. The hot syrup sets the meringue, which is what makes it so sturdy and airy.

The tricky part is having the whites and sugar ready at the same moment. If the syrup is ready too soon, it may turn to caramel and be lost, while overbeating the whites makes them lumpy and dry. I recommend using a standing mixer for the whites to give you more time to monitor the cooking syrup and to leave your hands free when you beat in the hot syrup.

**The sugar syrup takes the longest, so start with that.** Sugar syrup is traditionally made in a well-cleaned, unlined copper pan, but a heavy-based stainless-steel pan works just as well. Most recipes use a ratio of two parts sugar to one part water. Too little water may encourage crystallization, while too much water simply means a longer cooking time. As the syrup boils, water evaporates, and the syrup becomes more concentrated. For my soufflés, I jazz up the meringue by substituting lemon juice, apricot cooking liquid, and even fresh berries for some or all of the water to add flavor and color to the meringue.

Sugar can crystallize easily as it cooks, but a bit of acid, such as cream of tartar, vinegar, or lemon juice, should prevent this. If you notice crystals forming on the side of the pan as the syrup cooks, wipe them down with a clean, wet pastry brush, or cover the pan briefly with a tight-fitting lid to create steam that will wash the crystals down the sides of the pan.

## Careful timing leads to firm yet fluffy Italian meringue



*The syrup needs a head start, so begin cooking it before beating the egg whites. When the temperature hits 220°F, start your mixer. (This syrup is flavored with raspberry.)*



*When the egg whites form soft peaks, add the confectioners' sugar and keep beating until shiny peaks form. Don't worry if the syrup isn't quite hot enough: the whites will wait for a few minutes.*



*When the syrup reaches 248° (or 240° for the raspberry syrup), pour it in a steady stream over the whites, aiming just to the side of the whip.*



*Keep beating until the bowl is cool to the touch.*

Once the syrup reaches 220°F, begin beating the whites at medium speed. The syrup still has another 5 to 10 minutes to go at this stage, which is about the time needed to beat the egg whites. Gradually increase the mixer speed as the whites stiffen.

A pinch of cream of tartar added to the whites at the beginning makes a silkier, sturdier meringue, and a bit of confectioners' sugar added toward the end of beating sweetens and further stabilizes the meringue. Once the whites are voluminous and stiff, turn off the mixer and monitor the sugar syrup closely. The temperature will climb quickly and you need to be ready when it hits 248°. If the sugar syrup cooks faster than the egg whites, carefully add a little bit of water to the syrup to bring its temperature down. If, on the other hand, the peaks of the egg whites are in danger of becoming too stiff, turn off the mixer until the sugar syrup is ready. They can easily sit for 5 to 10 minutes while you wait for the syrup.

When the temperature of the sugar syrup reaches 248°F (or 240° for the berry syrup), gradually pour it in a steady stream onto the egg whites with the mixer running. Aim the syrup between the whip and the bowl so the moving beater doesn't splash the hot syrup to the sides of the bowl where it will harden and not mix.

## You can hold these soufflés unbaked for three days in the fridge or a week in the freezer.

Continue to beat the meringue until the bottom of the bowl feels cool to the touch, about 10 minutes.

### ASSEMBLE THE LAYERS OF FLAVOR

Once you've prepared the fruit center and



*Piping the Italian meringue is easy and neat, but you could use a spoon to fill the ramekins, too. Smooth the tops of the soufflés with a butter knife or an offset spatula.*

*A surprise inside. Fresh berries, lemon curd, or apricot purée adds contrasting texture and flavor.*

the meringue, it's time to put the soufflés together. Individual ramekins or straight-sided coffee cups make the most elegant (and easy) presentation. Brushing the insides with melted butter prevents the soufflé from sticking, but can cause problems as the soufflés rise—they'll slip and slide on the buttered ramekins. Give them something to cling to by dusting the buttered surface with confectioners' sugar and gently tapping out the excess.

**Each soufflé gets three layers of meringue that sandwich two spoonfuls of filling.** Use a pastry bag or a spatula to get the meringue into the mold and a tablespoon for the filling. The meringue goes in first, about halfway to the top of each ramekin, followed by a tablespoon of filling, another layer of meringue, a second spoonful of filling, and finally a smooth top layer of meringue. With smooth-textured fillings, like preserves or curd, I lightly swirl the meringue and filling together at each layer for a more homogenous texture. The Italian meringue is much less delicate than a classic soufflé, so don't worry about deflating it as you work.

**These soufflés can wait.** Unlike traditional soufflés, which must be baked immediately, these soufflés can be refrigerated (or even frozen) and then baked when you're ready to serve them. Soufflés refrigerated for a few hours may be left uncovered, but for longer periods, cover them loosely with plastic wrap. For freezing, wrap a layer of foil around the plastic. These soufflés hold for up to three days in the refrigerator or for up to one week in the freezer. To defrost a frozen soufflé, simply leave it at room temperature for half an hour before baking.

### SERVE SOUFFLÉS RIGHT FROM THE OVEN

Soufflés taste best when still a bit moist and creamy inside. Overcooking makes the insides overly dry and, since the whites are already partially cooked by the sugar syrup, there's no reason to fear that the eggs are undercooked. Once the soufflés are lightly browned and nicely risen—they tend to inflate a bit less than a classic soufflé—serve them immediately on small dessert plates. A sprinkle of confectioners' sugar dresses them up nicely, but sometimes I also offer a little ice cream, crème anglaise, or fruit purée on the side.



Puffed and browned, these soufflés just want a dusting of sugar for decoration.

## Master Recipe for Fruit Soufflés

Begin by making one fruit filling and the matching sugar syrup, and then continue with the meringue and the soufflé assembly. Yields eight individual soufflés.

**Sugar syrup from one of the following recipes**  
**6 egg whites (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup)**

**$\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. cream of tartar**

**$\frac{1}{4}$  cup confectioners' sugar; more for the ramekins and for sprinkling**

**For the berry soufflé only: 2 Tbs. Chambord or other berry liqueur**

**Fruit filling from one of the following recipes**

Butter eight individual ramekins or straight-sided coffee cups; dust the buttered surface with confectioners' sugar and gently tap out the excess. Heat the oven to 400°F and set the rack in the lower third of the oven.

**Make the Italian meringue**—Cook the sugar syrup until it reaches 220° on a candy thermometer. Start beating the egg whites and cream of tartar in a standing mixer on medium speed. Gradually increase the speed to the highest setting. When the whites form soft peaks, add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup confectioners' sugar in a slow, steady sprinkle. Beat until the whites form stiff, shiny peaks. If this happens before the sugar syrup reaches 248° (240° for the berry syrup), turn off the mixer.

Remove the sugar syrup from the heat as soon as it reaches 248°F (240° for the berry syrup). Turn the mixer back on to the highest speed if you have turned it off. Pour the hot syrup between the bowl and the beaters in a slow, steady stream. (For the berry soufflé, add the liqueur). Continue beating until the mixing bowl feels cool, about 10 min.

**Assemble and bake the soufflés**—Using a pastry bag or a spoon, fill the ramekins halfway with the meringue, spreading it evenly. Add about 1 Tbs. filling to each

ramekin. Lightly swirl the filling into the meringue with a knife. Fill the ramekins with more meringue to just below the rim and add the remaining filling. Divide the remaining meringue among the ramekins and, using a butter knife or small offset spatula, smooth the top of each soufflé. At this point, the soufflés can be refrigerated for up to three days or frozen for up to a week.

Set the soufflés on a baking sheet and bake until the tops are light brown, 8 to 10 min. Remove them carefully from the oven and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar if you like.

### Fruit Fillings

#### LEMON CURD

**6 egg yolks**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh lemon juice**  
 **$1\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. finely grated lemon zest**  
**1 Tbs. unsalted butter**

In a small double-boiler insert or a stainless-steel bowl over simmering water, combine the egg yolks, sugar, lemon juice, and zest. Stir the mixture over the simmering water until it becomes thick and creamy—the consistency of mayonnaise—3 to 5 min. Remove the bowl from the double boiler, whisk in the butter and stir until incorporated. Covered tightly and refrigerated, the lemon curd will keep for three days.

#### BERRY FILLING

**6 oz. ( $1\frac{1}{3}$  cups) fresh or thawed frozen raspberries or blackberries or  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup berry preserves**  
**If using berries: 2 Tbs. sugar, or to taste**

If using berries, toss them with sugar and let them sit while you make the meringue.

#### APRICOT-ORANGE PUREE

**1 cup packed dried apricots**  
 **$1\frac{1}{2}$  cups orange juice**  
**1 tsp. grated fresh ginger**  
 **$1\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. grated lemon zest**

In a small saucepan over medium heat, mix the apricots, orange juice, ginger, and zest;



Keep the soufflé center moist and creamy by avoiding overcooking.

simmer until the apricots are tender, about 20 min. Remove from the heat and leave the apricots in the juice to cool, about 15 min.

Strain the apricots, pressing hard to squeeze out as much liquid as possible. You should have about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of apricot cooking liquid. If necessary, add more water to make  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup and set aside to use in the meringue. Purée the strained apricots until smooth.

### Flavored Sugar Syrups

#### LEMON SUGAR SYRUP

**$1\frac{1}{4}$  cups sugar**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup fresh lemon juice**

Combine the sugar and lemon juice in a small heavy-based stainless-steel saucepan; bring to a boil. Begin the procedure for the meringue when the syrup reaches 220° on a candy thermometer.

#### BERRY SUGAR SYRUP

**1 lb. fresh or thawed unsweetened frozen raspberries or blackberries**  
**1 cup sugar**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  cup water**  
**1 tsp. fresh lemon juice**

Choose a heavy-based stainless-steel saucepan that's large enough to accommodate the berry mixture, which tends to bubble up as it cooks. Combine the berries, sugar, water, and lemon juice in the pan; bring to a boil. Cook at a rapid boil, stirring occasionally until the berries have disintegrated and rendered all their juices, about 10 min. Remove the pan from the heat and immediately pour the mixture through a fine sieve suspended over a clean, heat-safe mixing bowl. Using a large spoon or the bottom of a small ladle, gently press the berry pulp in the strainer to get all the juices but none of the seeds. You should have about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups. Return the strained syrup to a clean saucepan set over medium-high heat. It will be quite thick and bubbly as it boils. Begin the procedure for the meringue when the syrup reaches 220° on a candy thermometer. Watch carefully to be sure it doesn't scorch and note that it should only cook to 240°.

#### APRICOT-ORANGE SUGAR SYRUP

**$\frac{3}{4}$  cup apricot cooking liquid from apricot filling recipe (if there isn't enough liquid, add water to equal  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup)**  
 **$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar**

Combine the apricot cooking liquid and sugar in a small heavy-based stainless-steel saucepan; bring to a boil. Begin the procedure for the meringue when the syrup reaches 220° on a candy thermometer.

Laurann Claridge studied at Ecole Lenôtre and La Varenne in France. She hosts the Houston-based radio show "Food Talk," on KPRC-950AM. ♦

## Making and using a roux as a classic thickener

A rich béchamel sauce, a classic clam chowder, and a spicy gumbo may not seem to have much in common. Yet all three are thickened with a cooked mixture of flour and fat known as roux. Roux (pronounced ROO) is one of the cornerstones of sauce-making and it's made in three versions: white, blond, and brown (see photos below).

Most recipes call for equal weights of fat and flour, but



*White roux cooks for only a few minutes. Use it when you want to thicken without adding color or flavor.*



*Blond roux cooks a little longer and has more flavor. Use it to enrich chowders and cream-based soups.*



*Dark brown roux cooks the longest and has a complex flavor. It's a classic ingredient in gumbo.*

making roux is not an exact science. Experienced cooks often add the flour until it *looks* right. A colleague describes perfect roux as "wet sand at low tide": moist but not runny.

As a roux cooks, it gets darker and its flavor becomes more complex. It's important to understand, however, that as a roux colors, it loses its ability to thicken because the starch in the flour is broken down by the heat. You'll need more brown roux than blond to thicken the same amount of liquid. A truly dark roux won't thicken at all.

### HOW TO MAKE A ROUX

Begin by heating the fat. Butter is used most often, but different tastes and traditions call for different fats, including vegetable oil, clarified butter, lard, or duck fat. Once the butter is melted, add the flour and stir until smooth. Coating the flour with fat prevents it from forming lumps when mixed with a liquid.

Cook roux over medium-low heat and stir constantly to prevent scorching. High heat will burn a roux, making it grainy and off tasting.

### ADDING LIQUID TO A ROUX

Once a roux is cooked to the proper color, gradually add the liquid your recipe calls for, whisking constantly. I prefer to warm the liquid slightly first. If it's too cold, you'll spend extra time whisking while the sauce comes to a simmer. But if the liquid is too hot, the sauce may thicken so

quickly that it becomes lumpy. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer, skimming any foam or fat that rises to the surface.

**Long cooking improves both the flavor and the texture of the sauce.** A roux-thickened sauce should simmer for at least 30 minutes. As the liquid reduces and thickens, the pasty taste of raw flour disappears, and the sauce becomes rich tasting and velvety smooth.

## Choosing the best whisk

When it comes to kitchenware, I've always thought it excessive to have more than one version of any tool, but I make an exception for whisks. I have three—a straight whisk, a balloon whisk, and a flat whisk—and I use them to handle different tasks.

**A straight whisk is essential for making smooth sauces.** It also comes in handy for mixing and folding. Sometimes referred to as a French whisk, the straight whisk has an elongated shape and relatively stiff wires, making it sturdy enough for stirring heavy batters.

**A balloon whisk aerates egg whites, cream, and light batters.**

Its thin wires make this whisk much lighter than a straight whisk, so whipping egg whites for meringue is a lot less tiring. The large bulb-shaped head and delicate wires can beat the maximum amount of air into thin liquids.

**A flat whisk makes easy work of stirring a roux or deglazing a pan.** Also known as a skillet, shovel, or roux whisk, its flat shape means you won't miss any lumps of flour or bits of caramelized juices stuck in the corner of a roasting pan.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A WHISK

Whisks are sold by size, measuring from the tip of the handle to the top of the wires. I find 12-inch whisks most useful, but different sizes come in handy for small or large amounts of food. No matter what size or style you're buying, look for these features:

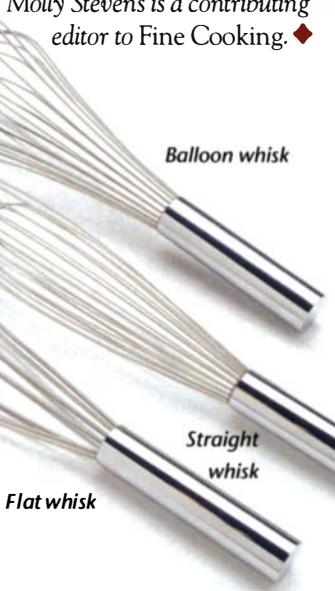
◆ **stainless-steel wires**, which won't corrode, chip, or react with acidic foods. If you're concerned about scratching a nonstick surface, whisks with nylon wire are now available.

◆ **a sealed handle**, which ensures that liquids and food can't get into the handle and cause corrosion or problems with bacteria.

◆ **a sturdy handle**; professionals prefer stainless steel.

*Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*

Photos: Scott Phillips



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# Keep Great Flavor and Texture in Foods You Freeze



**H**ave you ever wondered why some foods emerge from the freezer looking and tasting great, while others become unappealing, if not unpalatable? In general, freezing does an excellent job at preserving foods; however, some foods simply do not freeze well and some require special treatment before freezing. It's good to know which foods are the best candidates for freezing as you're eying the lamb chops on sale or deciding whether to bake a double batch of focaccia.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FREEZER

Cold slows down but does not completely halt the reactions—chemical, enzymatic, and physiological—that cause changes and deterioration in foods. Freezing also causes some cell damage.

**All fresh food contains water, and as food freezes, ice crystals form between the cells.** This causes the water inside the cell to flow through the cell membrane to replace

the water that has been frozen, because water always tries to be in balance on both sides of a cell. Once outside the cell, this replacement water also freezes. Meanwhile, the liquid in the cells becomes more and more concentrated in natural salts, finally so much so that it won't freeze. Eventually, this liquid becomes so concentrated that it

**You need to know which foods freeze best, wrap them tight, and freeze them fast.**

denatures the cell membranes, causing them to shrink, which in turn makes the cell leak and lose even more water. This explains why thawed meats can taste dry and once firm, crisp vegetables can become soft and limp.

**Frozen water also damages cell structure in another way.** As water freezes, it expands to form ice crystals.

*Freeze berries individually and then store them in plastic. The flavor will be fine, though the texture will soften.*



When food freezes slowly, a few crystals form gradually and then grow into progressively larger crystals as the temperature drops. These large crystals occupy a lot of space. On the other hand, if a food freezes rapidly, a process called "sharp freezing," thousands of small crystals form at once. These small crystals are much less damaging to the cells than the larger crystals and cause less overall moisture loss and texture change. See the sidebar on p. 76 for tips on successful freezing.

and type of fat present—lean meats and fish last longer than fatty ones, and more saturated fats stay fresh longer than unsaturated fats. For example, the fat in beef tops the list for saturation and so beef can be frozen for 12 months while fish, the fat of which is much less saturated, shouldn't be kept for more than a few months in the freezer.

(Continued on p. 76)

## AVERAGE SHELF LIFE OF FROZEN FOODS

TYPE OF FOOD	SHELF LIFE (in months)
Beef & lamb, steaks & roasts	12
Pork chops & roasts	4 to 8
Ground meat	3
Sausage	1 to 3
Whole turkey & chicken	12
Turkey & chicken parts	6
Whole duck & goose	6
Lean fish	6
Oily fish	2
Vegetables	8
Fruit	12
Butter	2
Heavy cream	1
Breads & rolls	2 to 3
Raw yeast dough	3
Unbaked fruit pies	6
Cakes	6

## WHICH FOODS FREEZE BEST

Although the principles of freezing are the same for all foods, the characteristics of different foods bring up specific concerns and problems.

**Meats and fish**—Fat in meat and fish can turn rancid even in the freezer. The shelf life of frozen meat and fish correlates directly to the amount

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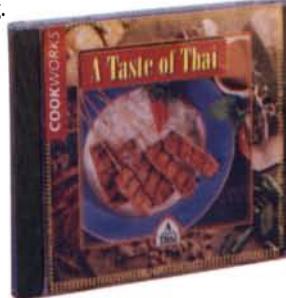
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A. Total no. copies (net press run)	231,935	244,784
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1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales	58,376	59,114
2. Mail subscriptions	82,038	93,830
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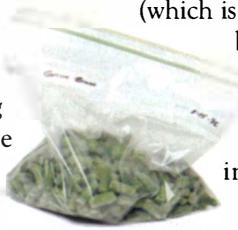
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# FOOD SCIENCE

(Continued from p. 74)

Ground meat has the shortest shelf life of all because grinding increases the risk of contamination and introduces oxygen, which promotes rancidity.

**Vegetables**—Raw vegetables are loaded with enzymes that, if left unchecked, can cause the vegetables to discolor and soften even in the freezer. Blanching the vegetables before freezing inactivates these enzymes.



*Frozen vegetables turn brown and soft unless blanched first.*

**Fruits**—One reason fruits turn soft and mushy is that the pectic substances that hold the cells together convert to soluble pectins and dissolve, causing the cells to fall apart. Either sugar or calcium added to the fruit before freezing will impede this process and preserve the fruit's texture.

**Eggs**—Raw egg whites freeze beautifully, but the yolks will turn thick and gelatinous. Add a bit of sugar or salt to the yolks to prevent this. On the other hand, cooked egg yolks freeze well, but cooked egg whites turn leathery and unappetizing.

**Dairy products**—Any frozen milk product with less than 40% butterfat will separate when thawed, while high-fat products like heavy cream won't. For example, decorated cakes with high-fat icings freeze well, but icings based on egg whites or sugar only (such as fondant, royal icing, or boiled icing) don't.



*High-fat dairy products freeze well, but only for a few months.*

Butter freezes easily with no changes in texture, but because of its high fat content, it will begin

to develop off tastes, indicating rancidity, after a few months.

**Emulsified sauces**—Most emulsions, mayonnaise for example, don't freeze well. Once the water freezes into ice crystals, it separates from the oil and the sauce breaks as it thaws. Hollandaise sauce (which is partially thickened by heated egg yolks) is an exception, and it can easily be whisked back into shape once it's thawed.

**Starch-bound sauces**—Sauces or custards thickened with flour or cornstarch don't freeze

well. Amylose, the type of starch predominant in grain starches such as wheat flour and cornstarch, freezes into a firm sponge network while the liquid drains out. On the other hand, sauces or custards thickened with root starches (such as arrowroot or tapioca) freeze and thaw beautifully.

**High-starch foods**—Potatoes, pasta, barley, rice, and other grain-based starches disintegrate much like sauces thickened with grain starches (above), but if they're mashed or mixed with a sauce they fare well. On its own, a high-starch food turns into a dry sponge and a puddle, but when mixed with a liquid, such as pasta in sauce or mashed potatoes with cream, the "puddle" gets incorporated into the sauce and the "sponge" stays moistened.

**Baked goods**—Baked goods low in moisture are ideal for freezing and their texture suffers little. Breads, rolls, and even raw yeast doughs can be frozen. Yeast loses

some activity in the cold, so add a little extra yeast to doughs that are to be frozen. Properly wrapped pastry freezes well, baked or unbaked.

Unbaked fruit pies freeze well, but the raw fruit may suffer some. A little oatmeal or cookie crumbs added to a fruit filling will work to absorb moisture that may leak out during thawing of higher-moisture fruits like apples or peaches.

**Soups and casseroles**—These are some of the best candidates for

*Make fruit pies ahead and freeze unbaked. The fillings will need a little more thickening.*



the freezer. The soft and composite character of casseroles and soups allows a lot of leeway in terms of slight texture changes. For soups, it's best to whisk in any milk, cream, or egg yolk after thawing to avoid curdling.

Shirley O. Corriher, of Atlanta, is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. She teaches food science and cooking classes around the country. Her book, *Cookwise*, is being published in May by William Morrow. ♦

## Tips for better freezing

### ◆ Check your freezer temperature.

Ideally, home freezers operate at about 0°F and can freeze food quickly. Poorly operating freezers and ice-tray compartments will freeze food slowly (between 25° and 31°F), resulting in larger ice crystals and poor texture in your frozen food.

**◆ Wrap food tightly.** Limit moisture loss and prevent freezer burn by sealing food tightly in moisture- and vapor-proof wrap. Freezer burn occurs when the moisture from the surface of food evaporates. Be sure to use plastic bags that are specifically for freezer use, nonpermeable plastic wrap (Saran) or containers, and squeeze out as much air as possible before sealing.

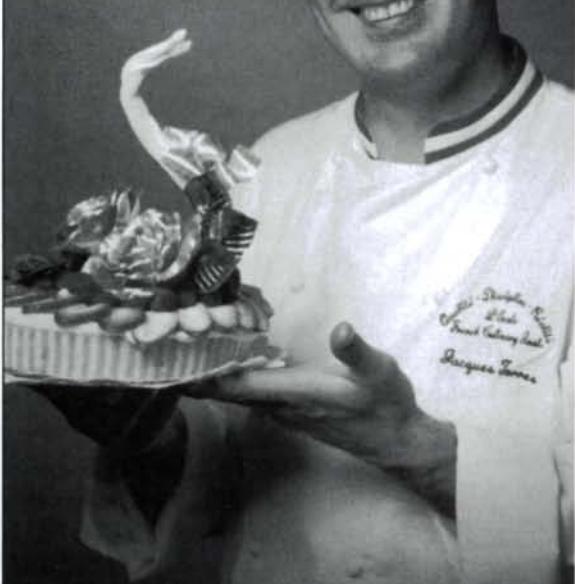


**◆ Freeze food quickly.** Set the food on the freezer's lowest shelf, which is usually colder than the upper shelves. When the food is frozen solid, it can then be moved to another shelf. Adding too much frozen food can warm up the freezer, so add only about 10% of the freezer's capacity at a time.

**◆ Don't exceed the expected shelf life.** Even foods that freeze well deteriorate if left in the freezer too long. Label and date frozen foods. Use the chart on p. 74 as a guideline for maximum storage time.

Jacques Torres

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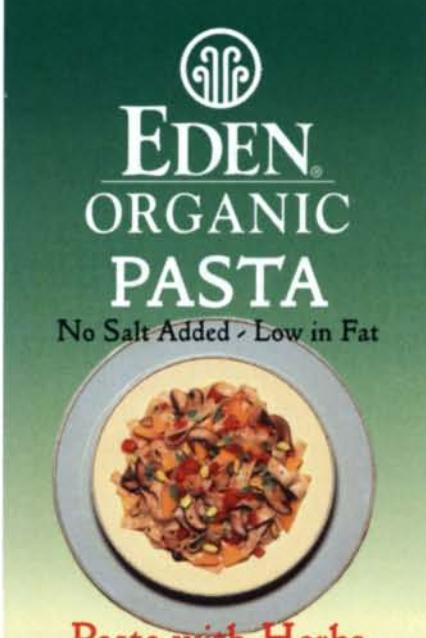
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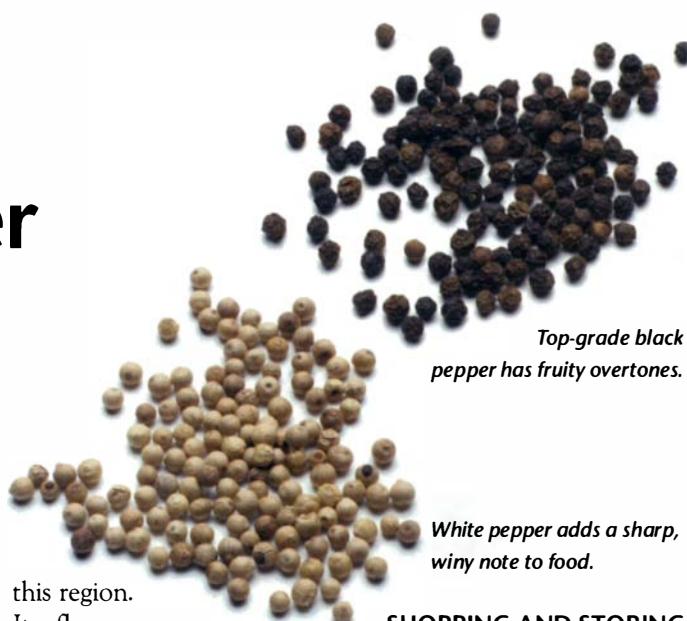
Peppercorns (*Piper nigrum*) grow on stalks known as spikes.

**Black, white, and green peppercorns come from the same plant.** All are harvested green, but the corns are processed differently to yield the variation of color and flavor in the final product.

**The best black pepper-corn comes from India's Malabar coast,** where long, hot summers and monsoon rains create the perfect growing climate. Indian peppercorns have a bold, fruity fragrance with none of the sneezy sharpness of less mature peppercorns from other countries. All peppercorns are picked, sun-dried, and graded by size. Only the largest 10% from Malabar are labeled Tellicherry; look for this top grade in gourmet shops and catalogs.

**Sumatra and Borneo produce the choicest white pepper.** Large, mature corns are soaked to remove the outer mantles, revealing a smooth white interior. The creamiest white corns, the most desirable, are picked out by hand. White pepper has a sharp, almost

winy flavor, quite different from black. It's considered more desirable and refined in many places: in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, for example, you'll rarely see black pepper unless it's assumed that, as a Westerner, you'd prefer it. Pungent white pepper forms the basis for the spicy, vibrant tastes of



Top-grade black pepper has fruity overtones.

White pepper adds a sharp, winy note to food.

this region.

Its flavor comes out best at high heat. In classical Western cooking, white pepper is often preferred in cream sauces, soups, and dishes where black pepper might look too rough. But don't let its whiteness fool you into thinking it's mild: white pepper packs a punch.

**Green peppercorns are the youngest.** Traditionally, they've been available packed in a salt brine. Dried green peppercorns are relatively new on the market. Slightly milder than black or white pepper, green peppercorns are great for flavoring lighter dishes. Dried green corns are fragile enough to crush with your fingers.

**Pink "peppercorns" aren't really peppercorns:** they're the berries of an unrelated tree. They add color to a mix of true peppercorns.

*Green pepper is a milder partner for delicate foods.*



## EXPERIMENT WITH PEPPERCORNS

- ◆ Black peppercorns are indispensable in savory dishes such as pasta, salads, eggs, fish, and beef. They'll enliven sweets, too: grind some into ginger-snap or brown-bread batter, stewed fruits, hot chocolate, or spiced cider.
- ◆ Try white peppercorns on seared or grilled meats, Indonesian-style satays and shish kebabs, Chinese hot and sour soups, and creamed soups. Add them to black peppercorns in your mill for a broader range of flavor.
- ◆ Dried green peppercorns are good with poultry, vegetables, fish, and seafood. Use green corns by themselves or include them in a peppercorn mix for added aroma and depth.
- ◆ Toss brined green peppercorns whole into potato salads and pasta.

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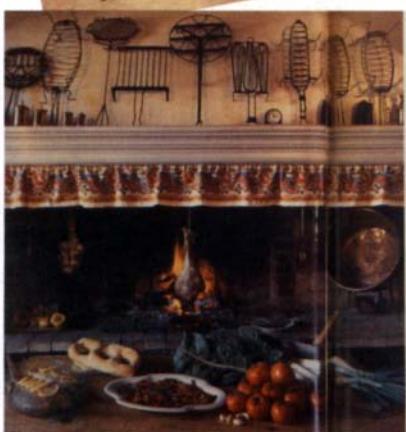
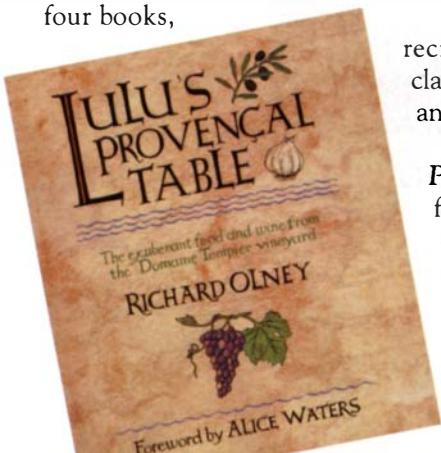
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# Cookbooks that Capture the Flavors of Provence

I spent much of my childhood on a 400-year-old farm nestled in the rocky foothills of Haute-Provence. My parents raised pigs, rabbits, and goats, and made goat cheese to sell at local markets. What I remember most about my childhood in Provence is the food—the earthy cooking, infused with fragrant herbs from the hillsides, reflecting the seasonal changes.

Today it's easy for me to rekindle my memories of this heady food by cooking from a coterie of wonderful Provençal cookbooks. Among my favorites are the following four books,



each true to the flavors of Provence but written from a different perspective. The first immerses the reader in the life of a true Provençal cook, while the next is a New York chef's interpretation of the food of his Provençal childhood. The third reflects an American's life in her adopted home of Provence, and the fourth is a cooking teacher's straightforward collection of

story of Lulu and Lucien Peyraud and their entire wine-making family, and he includes old black-and-white family photos to show his subjects. Olney takes the reader into Lulu's kitchen, the heart of Domaine Tempier, a vineyard not far from the coast near Banon, France. With the ease and culinary confidence of a lifelong food lover and cook, Lulu cooks everything from

**You can almost smell the lavender  
and taste the tapenade while turning  
the pages of these books.**

recipes she shares in her classes at home in Provence and in New York City.

Richard Olney's *Lulu's Provençal Table* is a beautifully written book that became an instant classic when it was published in 1994. Olney tells the

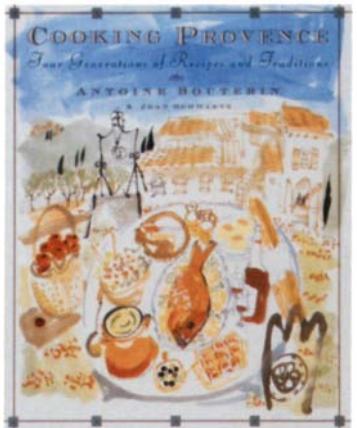
*Richard Olney's portrait of  
Lulu Peyraud brings to life  
the Provençal family farm.*



simple vegetable soups to lavish feasts, with a special feel for the bounty of fish and shellfish available to her.

Lulu Peyraud cooks with the seasons, cherishing each delicacy that may only appear a few weeks each year. Olney takes the readers through Lulu's seasonal kitchen, first by offering sample menus, and then by exploring Lulu's cooking—from soups to tarts—with individual recipes. Fall and winter menus include Radicchio & Lamb's Lettuce Salad, Rabbit Stew, and Roast Guinea Fowl, while spring and summer menus include recipes for Green Bean & Fresh Shell Bean Salad, Grilled Lamb Skewers, classic Ratatouille, and Apricot Compote.

My memories lured me into the kitchen to make Pork Chops with Juniper and Tomatoes à la Provençale.



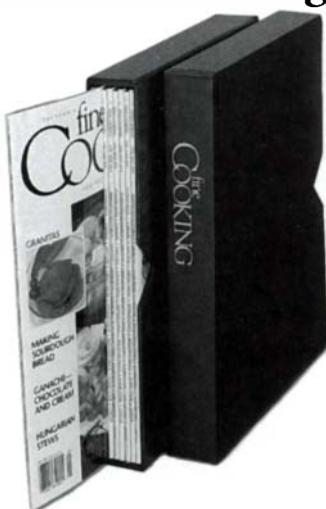
*Antoine Bouterin's innovative recipes highlight his personal memories of "old" Provence.*

The simple dish of roasted tomatoes seasoned with parsley, garlic, and breadcrumbs becomes something sublime under Lulu's direction.

*Cooking Provence*, by New York chef Antoine Bouterin and writer Joan Schwartz, is both a cookbook and a memoir. Bouterin, a native of Saint-Rémy-de-Provence near Arles, writes of his homeland and the culinary legacy he inherited. His story of his childhood home and his grandmother's kitchen depicts a piece of Provençal life which is, sadly, slowly disappearing. In "old" Provence, everyone lived off home gardens, the hillsides, and daily markets.

While Bouterin introduces each section of his book with family vignettes, this is really a recipe-driven book, with more than 200 included (and very few color photos). In his recipes, Bouterin concentrates on the traditional ingredients of the region—herbs, olives, garlic, olive oil, and tomatoes. And fish play a starring role in Bouterin's cooking, as Saint-Rémy is not far from the coast. Bouterin remembers that Wednesday was saltwater fish day at the market when he was

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# REVIEWS

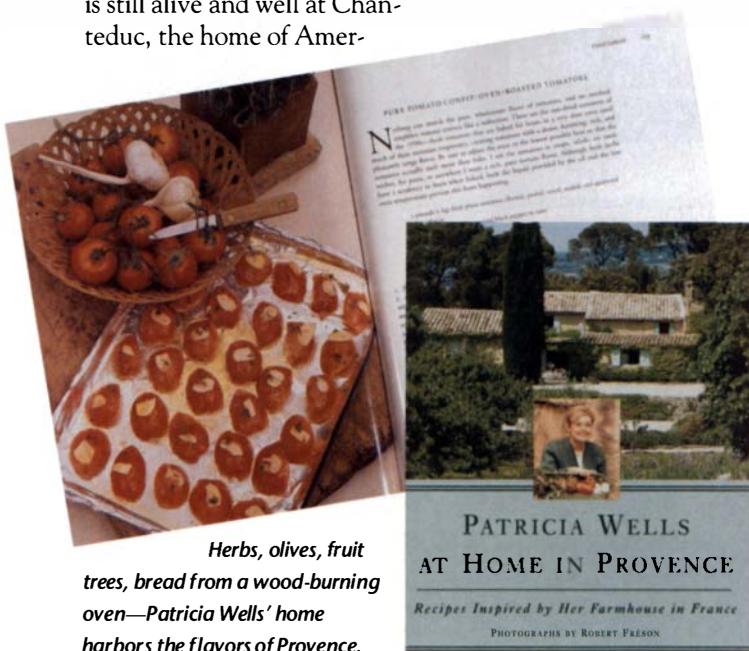
a child. Today his recipes include Codfish Fritters, Red Snapper Fillets with Prune Stuffing & Grape Sauce, and a variation of something I remember eating in Provence called Sardines in Court Bouillon. Bouterin's sardine recipe is simple to prepare and delicately flavored with white wine, garlic, and herbs.

Bouterin is also fond of lavender, and includes a recipe for Apple Lavender Pound Cake, which I enjoyed making. Though it took a bit longer to cook than the recipe indicated, this cake smelled of Provence itself when it came out of the oven, and the apples made a lovely crust.

Bouterin's "old" Provence is still alive and well at Chan-  
teduc, the home of Amer-

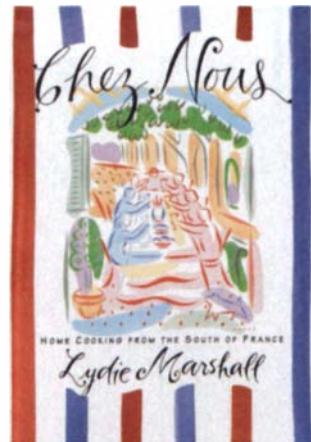
and gathered large groups of new and old friends for frequent meals.

All this has simplified Ms. Wells' personal cooking style, bringing it in line with the seasonal, wholesome cooking of Provence. A hearty meal might start with a wedge of custardy Tomato Clafoutis or dish of Harissa Olives. The All-Star Herb Salad might precede a lusty bowl of Monkfish Bouillabaisse. Dinner could be a Butter-Roasted Herbed Chicken or Seared Pancetta-Wrapped Cod. Her breads include a Golden Parmesan Pepper Loaf and a Provençal Olive Oil Brioche. A seasonal dessert might be the Apricot Honey Almond Tart.



ican journalist Patricia Wells and her husband, Walter. A dozen years ago, the two purchased this old stone farmhouse in northern Provence and set out to restore it. *Patricia Wells at Home in Provence* is the delicious result of their new life. The two have cultivated figs, apricots, and olives, as well as grapes for the house wine. They've built a new wood-fired bread oven,

Throughout the book, Wells answers questions an American cook might ask ("Just what is a ragoût?"). And she concludes with a section of recipes for the pantry, so that Provençal flavors such as aïoli, pistou, and home-cured olives are never out of reach. Generous photographs illustrate the food and the place that make these meals special.



*Lydie Marshall invites readers into her kitchen to sample honest and flavorful Provençal cooking.*

No one embraces the philosophy of "keep it simple" better than Lydie Marshall, author of *Chez Nous—Home Cooking from the South of France*. Marshall, who spends summers at home in her native France and winters in New York City, is a seasoned cooking teacher on both continents. Whether it's One-Hour Beef Broth or Candied Lemon Tart, Marshall highlights the essential ingredients of Provence by cooking them with a minimum of embellishments. Her vegetables alone—Fava Bean Purée, Fennel Fondue, Stuffed Porcini—inspire a mad rush to the market, despite the lack of photographs in this very functional book.

Rarely does a recipe have more than six or eight ingredients, and yet each teaches so much. For example, she uses one dough recipe for three different types of bread—*pissaladière*, *fougasse*, and *baguettes*. Her savory meat dishes (Chicken with Yogurt & Mustard, Rabbit Rillettes, Braised Pork Shoulder) just make sense. *Chez Nous* really brings the Provençal spirit out of the hillsides and into the kitchens of American cooks.

## ALSO RECOMMENDED

If by now you are fairly swooning for a slice of cherry clafoutis and a glass of pastis, there are

still four more books I recommend to you: *Pedaling through Provence*, by Sarah Leah Chase—classic recipes, warm anecdotes; *Recipes from a Provençal Kitchen*, by Michel Biehn—an elegant, seasonal book; *Provence: The Beautiful Cookbook*, by Richard Olney—regional recipes, coffee-table looks; and *Provençal Light*, by Martha Rose Shulman—a comprehensive work of authentic recipes with a lighter touch.

Ethel W. Brennan successfully made the transition from Provençal farm life to city life in San Francisco. She is the co-author of *Citrus, Sun-Dried Tomatoes, and Goat Cheese* (all from Chronicle). ♦

## PUBLISHING INFORMATION

*Lulu's Provençal Table*, by Richard Olney. Harper Collins, 1994. \$30, hardcover; 364 pp. ISBN 0-06-016922-2.

*Cooking Provence*, by Antoine Bouterin. Macmillan, 1994. \$25, hardcover; 368 pp. ISBN 0-02-513955-X.

*Patricia Wells at Home in Provence*, by Patricia Wells. Scribner, 1996. \$40, hardcover; 349 pp. ISBN 0-684-81569-9.

*Chez Nous*, by Lydie Marshall. Harper Collins, 1995. \$25, hardcover; 303 pp. ISBN 0-06-017203-7.

*Pedaling Through Provence Cookbook*, by Sarah Leah Chase. Workman, 1995. \$14.95, softcover; 239 pp. ISBN 0-7611-0233-7.

*Recipes From a Provençal Kitchen*, by Michel Biehn. Flammarion, 1995. \$35, hardcover; 200 pp. ISBN 2-08013-586-4.

*Provence: The Beautiful Cookbook*, by Richard Olney. Collins, 1993. \$35, hardcover; 256 pp. ISBN 0-00-255154-3.

*Provençal Light*, by Martha Rose Shulman. Bantam Books, 1994. \$29.95, hardcover; 472 pp. ISBN 0-553-08723-1.

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**Include dates, a complete address, and the phone number for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. The deadline for entries in the June/July issue is March 1.**

## CALIFORNIA

**50th Annual Carrot Festival**—Holt Park, Holtville. This tiny desert community grows vegetables on some of the best farmland in the area, all watered by an intricate network of canals. Its produce is showcased in a carrot cooking contest, dinner banquet, and barbecue and rib cook off, ending with a parade and carnival. January 24 through February 2. Call 619/356-2923.

**4th Annual Napa Valley Mustard Festival**—Napa Valley. According to legend, fields of brilliant yellow mustard have bloomed in the wine country since one of the first European missionaries sowed seeds of Spanish mustard on his journey north through what is now California. The mustard blooms blazed a golden path for him to follow home. The two-month mustard season is filled with events celebrating the food, wine, and art of the region. February 1 through April 5. Call 707/259-9020.

**12th Annual Fetzer Red Wine & Chocolate Festival**—Fetzer Tasting Room & Visitor Center at Valley Oaks, Hopland. In honor of St. Valentine's Day, Zinfandel, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon will be paired with the finest chocolate from California's North Coast. Live music and food. February 8-9. Call 707/744-1250.

**Boston University Presents: A Food, Wine, and Cooking Tour to the Napa Valley with Mary Ann Esposito**—Join cookbook author and teacher Mary Ann Esposito on a gourmand's dream vacation through California's famed Napa Valley wine country. Explore the vineyards and wines, sample olive oil at a local factory, eat and drink at the finest restaurants and wineries, and when you're sated with the best the Valley has to offer, sit back and watch some pastry and cooking demonstrations. April 5-12. Call 617/353-9852, or fax 617/353-4130.

**Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival**—Riverside County Fairgrounds, Indio. More than 250,000 people attend this campy desert festival of "1001 Arabian Nights." See Queen Scheherazade and her Arabian Court perform in a musical pageant, watch men in Arabic costumes race camels and ostriches, learn all about dates in the exhibition at the "Taj Mahal" and, of course, eat dates cooked in a variety of imaginative ways. February 14-23. Call 800/44-INDIO.

## FLORIDA

**LaBelle Swamp Cabbage Festival**—Barron Park, LaBelle. Swamp cabbage is the unfortunate name Floridians have bestowed on the luscious hearts of palm, the tender hearts of the sabal palmetto. Swamp cabbage is served raw in salads, braised and served like a vegetable, used in baking cakes and cookies, baked in casseroles, deep-

fried as fritters, or steam-fried with white bacon. The festival takes place on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, beneath a canopy of live oaks whose graceful limbs are draped with Spanish moss. February 21-23. Call 941/675-2541.

## INDIANA

**Parke County Maple Fair**—Bilie Creek Village, Rockville. Watch maple syrup and maple cream being made the old-fashioned way at a primitive sugar camp set in a recreation of a turn-of-the-century village. Have a maple syrup pancake breakfast with fresh-cured bacon and ham. Visit the



Village's resident craftsmen: the potter, broom maker, candle and soap maker, weaver, miller, and blacksmith. February 21-23, 28 & March 1-2. Call 317/569-3430.

## MINNESOTA

**Twin Cities Food & Wine Experience**—Hyatt Regency, Minneapolis. Investigate over 150 exhibits of the latest in kitchen technology and new products; taste some of the best domestic wines available; and sample specialty foods such as smoked fish, exotic coffees, sourdough breads, homemade pestos and salsas, barbecue sauces, and more. There are over 40 wine and food seminars, plus a grand tasting, a gala winemakers dinner, and a champagne brunch. February 28 & March 1-2. Call Barbara Duff at 612/371-5812.

## MISSISSIPPI

**22nd Annual World Catfish Festival**—Belzoni. Barking fish, mud puppies, mud cats, bullheads, and whisker faces are some local nicknames for catfish, but regardless of what you call them, they're good eating, and people in this "Catfish Capital of the World" sure know how to cook them: catfish fillets are fried into crunchy, golden curls and served with crisp hush puppies and coleslaw. April 5. Call 800/408-4838.

## MISSOURI

**Italian Celebration**—The Saint Louis Art Museum. A celebration of the food, wine, music, and art of all the regions of Italy, with a different region featured each week. February 20 through April 20. Call Kay Porter or Debbie Boyer at 314/721-0072.

## NEVADA

**Pizza Expo '97**—Las Vegas Convention Center. Watch "pizza athletes" compete in the World Pizza Games for highest and longest pizza dough spin, fastest pizza maker, largest pizza dough stretch, and most innovative pizza routine. The World's Largest Pizza Show has over 700 exhibits, educational seminars, pizza recipe contest, and pizza baking demonstrations. March 24-27. For registration information, call 800/746-1122 or 812/949-0909.

## NEW MEXICO

**9th Annual National Fiery Foods Show**—Southeast Hall, Albuquerque Convention Center. More than 12,000 "pepperheads" converge for this "Meltdown" to taste, sell, and talk peppers. Check out the hot and spicy foods of hundreds of exhibitors, cooking demonstrations and cookbook signings, capsicum-related kitchenware, art, and clothing. February 28 through March 2. Call 505/298-3835, or visit the Web site at <http://www.fiery-foods.com/ffshow>.

## NEW YORK

**James Beard Foundation Culinary Events**—James Beard House, New York City. Call 800/36-BEARD or 212/627-2308 for information about the following three events:

♦ **Fête Provençal**—A French Provençal feast by Chef Robert Reynolds of Cooking School of the Rockies, Boulder, Colorado. February 6.

♦ **Chinese New Year Dinner**—With Chef Anita Lo of Mirezi Restaurant, New York. February 13.

♦ **Valentine's Dinner**—With Chefs Gale Grand & Rick Tramonto of Brasserie T, Northfield, Illinois. February 14. **U.S. Beer & Food Festival**—Bridgewater's at the South Street Seaport, New York City. Dozens of U.S. micro-brewers join top New York restaurants for this food and beer pairing event. March 10. Sponsored by the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call 212/447-0456.

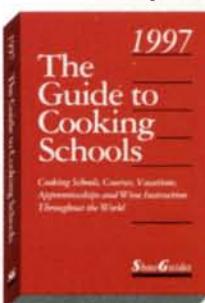
**Quintessential Wine Week**—New York City. Don't plan on going back to work if you lunch at one of six New York eateries during Wine Week, with each restaurant pouring 10 to 13 different wines complimentary each day with lunch, with unlimited refills. March 17-21. For a list of participating restaurants, call Beverly Barbour or Joyce Gee at 800/638-6449 or 212/838-2061.

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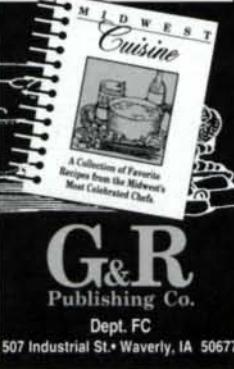
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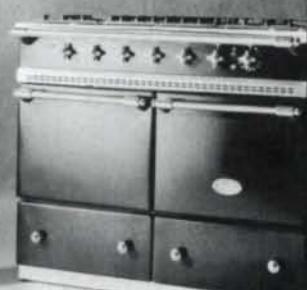
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Whipping eggwhites 69-70**INGREDIENTS**Beef, cuts for pot roast 28  
Beans, cooking 32-35; soaking 34; sources for 36  
Buttermilk 57  
Cabbage, blanching 49; braising 50; choosing 48; coring 48-49; shredding 48; stuffing 50; types 48Caramel 58-59  
Chicken stock, making 18-19  
Dumpling wrappers 64-65  
Egg whites, whipping 69-70  
Filé powder 41French bread, kneading 53-54; shaping 55-56; baking 56  
Italian meringue 69-71  
Lamb, cuts for pot roast 28  
Peppercorns, black 78; green 78; "pink" 78; white 78Pineapple, slicing 58  
Pork, cuts for pot roast 28  
Rémoulade sauce 41  
Roux, about 40, 43, 72; blond 72; brown 40, 43, 72; in gumbo 40, 43; white 72  
Salmon, baking 45; braising 45; choosing 45; determining doneness 46; fillets 45; making boneless salmon medallions 46; preventing sticking 45; sautéing 45; steaks 45  
Shrimp, boiling 41  
Sugar syrup 67; 69  
Winter greens 12-14**TOOLS**Banneton 55, 56  
Chinese rolling pin 64  
Couche 55, 56  
Instant-read thermometers, dial 60; digital 61; thermocouple 61  
Whisks, balloon 72; flat 72; straight 72**NUTRITION INFORMATION**

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories total from fat	Protein (g)	Carb (g)	total	Fats (g) sat mono poly	Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
Marinated Beef Pot Roast	30	310 80	41	15	9	3 4 0	120	540	2	based on 6 portions
Leg of Lamb w/Apricot-Orange Stuffing	31	320 80	32	24	8	3 4 1	95	360	3	based on 8 portions
Pork Roast with Fennel & Pears	31	300 80	35	18	9	3 4 1	105	630	4	based on 6 portions
Black Bean Soup with Salsa	35	380 100	18	55	11	4 3 3	20	750	18	per cup, with 1Tbs. crème fraîche
Gratin of Flageolet Beans & Sausage	36	580 230	26	63	25	6 15 3	30	1240	16	based on 6 portions
White Beans with Rosemary & Olive Oil	37	240 35	14	38	4.0	0.5 3.0 0.5	0	540	9	per cup
Shrimp Rémoulade	41	200 140	14	2	15	3 5 7	145	1050	1	includes sauce
Gumbo Ya Ya	42	910 420	35	83	47	11 17 15	95	1020	4	main course portion
Bread Pudding with Bourbon Sauce	43	770 480	10	58	54	32 16 2	315	320	1	includes 2 Tbs. sauce
Soy-Glazed Sautéed Salmon	46	270 110	32	2	13	2 4 5	90	520	0	
Braised Salmon Steaks with Cilantro	47	430 190	44	9	21	5 9 6	130	680	2	
Baked Salmon with Garlic & Herb Crust	47	370 220	33	3	25	4 14 5	90	350	1	
Braised Cabbage with Apples & Pecans	50	220 150	2	18	17	4 6 6	10	440	5	based on 8 portions
Red & Green Cabbage Salad	50	110 60	3	11	7	1 4 2	5	200	3	based on 8 portions
Alsation Stuffed Cabbage	51	680 360	42	40	40	15 17 4	230	1870	14	per serving (2 pieces)
Pain Paysan (Peasant Bread)	56	70 0	2	13	0	0 0 0	0	150	1	per slice (16 per loaf)
Pineapple Upside-Down Cake	59	440 120	5	77	13	8 4 1	85	130	2	
Meat & Cabbage Pot Stickers	65	50 20	2	4	2.5	0.5 1.0 0.5	5	75	0	per fried dumpling
Vegetable Dumplings	65	40 15	1	5	2.0	0 1.0 0.5	0	70	0	per steamed dumpling
Ginger & Scallion Sauce	65	15 10	0	1	1.0	0 0.5 0.5	0	130	0	per teaspoon
Lemon Soufflé	71	300 60	5	58	6	3 2 1	165	65	0	per soufflé
Berry Soufflé	71	190 15	3	42	1.5	0.5 0.5 0.5	5	60	3	per soufflé
Apricot-Orange Soufflé	71	170 10	4	38	1.0	0.5 0.5 0	5	65	1	per soufflé

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

# Good Food and Moral Ambiguity

My first memories of good food and morality waft from my grandmother's kitchen. It was wartime. I was four. My younger brother, my mother, and I had come to stay with my grandparents in their old Palo Alto adobe while my father went off to war. Hilda, the cook, reigned indomitable in the kitchen. Only my grandmother, clad in the white lab coat she always wore when she cooked, was allowed unchallenged entry through the pantry, which was lined to the ceiling with glass-faced cupboards full of breakable china, sharp cutlery, and brittle crystal. To a child, it looked as dangerous as an armory.

Grandmother's kitchen was a cavernous room with high windows I couldn't see out of, and a spotless black-and-white checkered linoleum floor that scuffed even when I tiptoed. A mammoth refrigerator took up the far end wall, with a series of little doors like hatch covers. I could only reach the lower doors, but they revealed square glass dishes filled with rose-pink hothouse rhubarb in its own sweet syrup and jellied bouillons and bottles of cream.

Across the kitchen, standing on black iron legs bow-legged by the weight of it, was the Garland range, a behemoth of a stove clad in white enamel with two ovens and eight gas burners covered by double boilers and soup kettles and steamers. The smells were intoxicating. Dough rose

above the top oven. A stockpot simmered on the back burner, filled with marrow bones or vegetables or chickens with yellow feet. Grandmother stood at the stove in her white lab coat, tasting, seasoning, finishing the sauces. Her lab coat convinced me that cooking was a science as deep and mysterious as biochemistry, to be taken seriously.

Hilda wouldn't even turn to look at me, which was impolite. "What do you want?" Her hands never strayed from the dough she was working—square Wisconsin hands, chilblained and calloused from her youth as a hired girl on a dairy farm. No wonder she hated my brother and me. At the age of ten she'd been given a room over her

one gray area was Hilda. Hilda was sullen, but her cheese soufflés puffed up like gilded clouds. Hilda was rude, but her intricately latticed berry pies were works of art. Hilda had had four husbands, but

**Hilda was sullen, Hilda was rude,  
but her cheese soufflés puffed up  
like gilded clouds.**

employer's barn, my mother told me. Some winter nights the hot-water bottle she took to bed froze solid. It had made her "hard," Mother said. I took the remark literally, though I never dared to touch her.

In a house where moral principles and good manners were strongly adhered to, the

Hilda's yeast-raised buckwheat pancakes were a dream. She put the pancake batter on the grand piano at night, decreeing the piano to be the perfect temperature for yeast-raised batter. Grandmother objected. One night the dough would rise up and ooze out onto the piano strings, she



said, but Hilda stubbornly insisted. Grandfather got up at five in the morning to punch down the dough, and at breakfast we would glory in stacks of buckwheat pancakes dripping with melted butter and maple syrup.

Hilda played with knives, and when a knife blade flashed in her hand, it looked to me like a treacherous game. It was common knowledge that nobody was allowed to play with knives. It was common knowledge that nobody was allowed to bother Hilda. Even Grandfather, a tall, formidable mining engineer who had spent his youth in the gold fields of Australia and Mexico, quailed in her stony presence. Grandmother, a straight-backed nonsense lady, made allowances for Hilda. Hilda was neither vain nor silly, two capital female offenses in my grandmother's view. Hilda had been blighted, Grandmother said ominously. I wasn't sure what "blighted" meant, but I looked for spots.

When Hilda announced dinner, we went in to dinner. Nobody, ambassador nor Arab prince, was allowed to straggle. Hilda's creamed sweetbreads or crab timbale waited for no man. In that early, delicious kitchen, I learned there was another moral standard, fudged on the edges, one reserved for good cooks.

—Sally Small,  
Orinda, California ♦

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LOVE  
is a tool you do  
NOT USE.*

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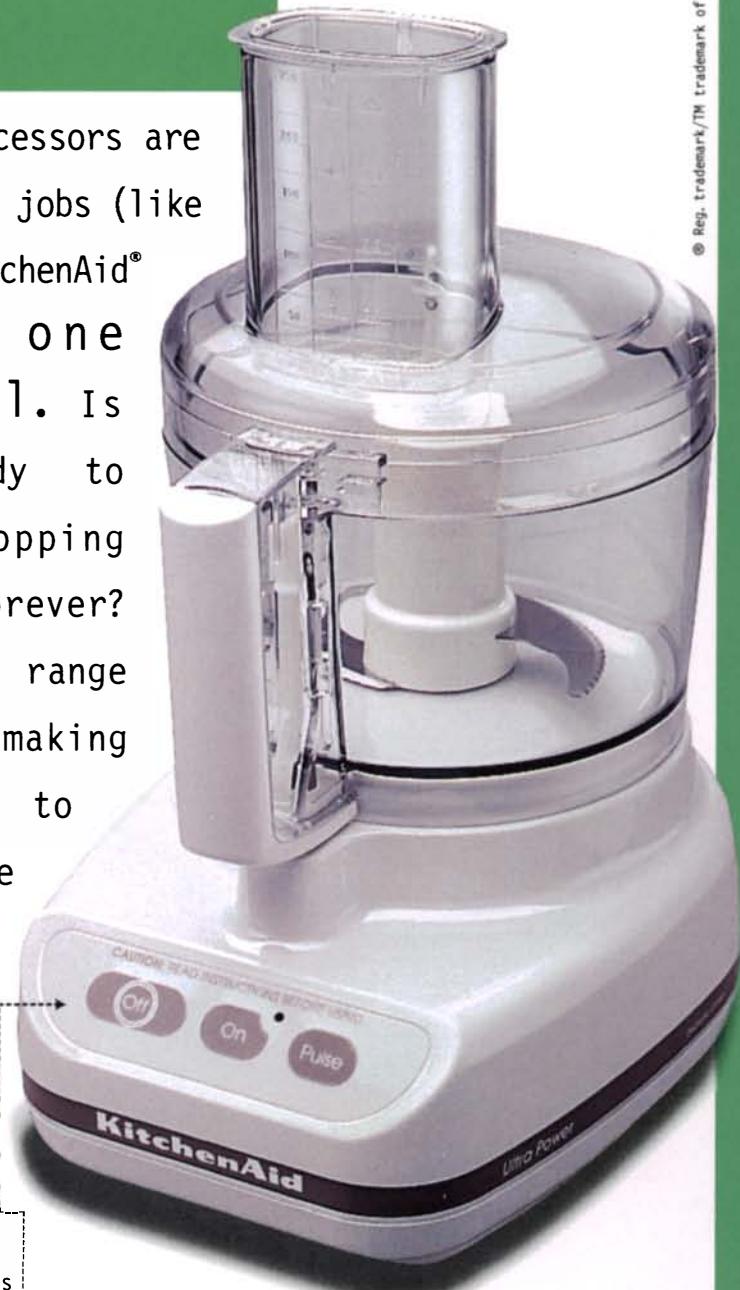
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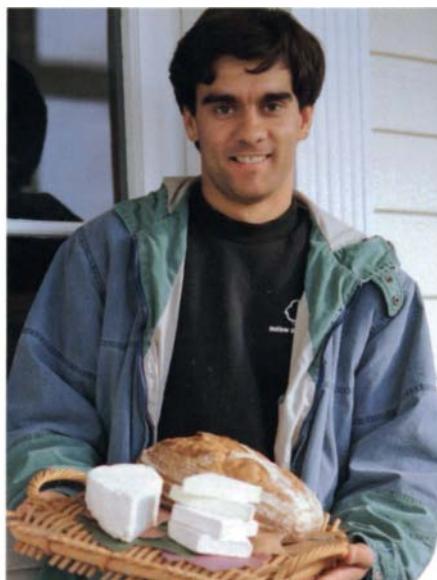
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# Prizewinning Cheese from Sheep's Milk

Sheep's milk makes a uniquely rich and flavorful cheese but, until eight years ago, no sheep's milk cheese was made in this country. Then a small sheep dairy in New York's Hudson River Valley began experimenting with hand-crafted cheeses. Today, the Old Chatham Shepherding Company in Stuyvesant, New York, uses primarily sheep's milk to make its cheeses. In 1995, the dairy's Hudson Valley Camembert won a blue ribbon from the American Cheese Society. One expert calls the dairy's Saint André style cheese "lush, creamy, and rich as ice cream."

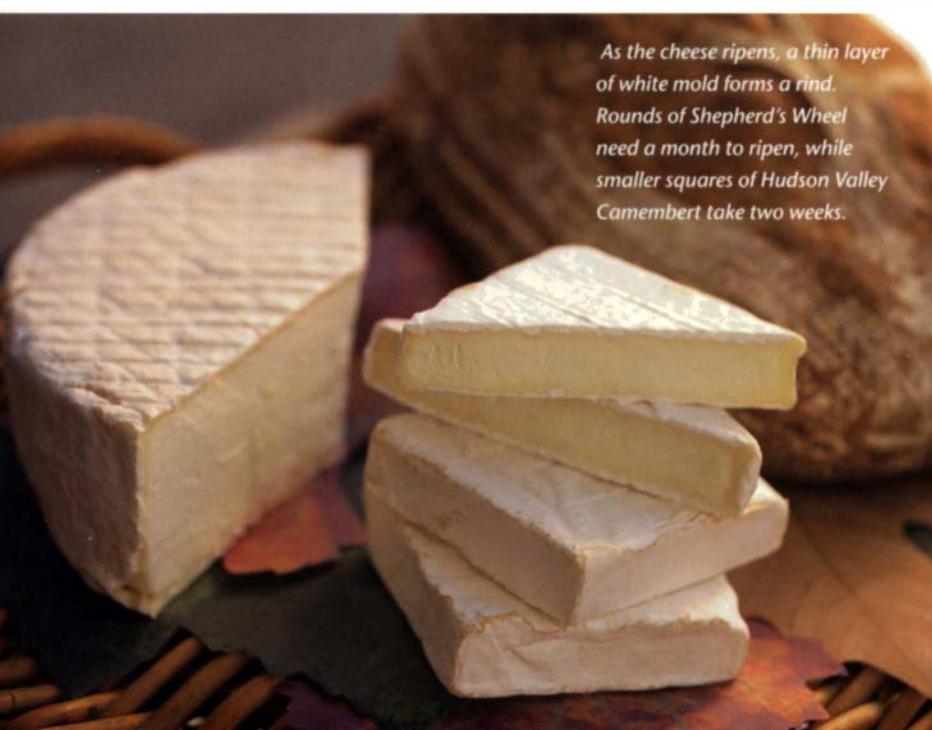


*It takes a lot of sheep to make sheep's milk cheese. These sheep produce less than 2 quarts of milk a day, compared with the 40 quarts a cow can give.*



*"There's no big secret to this—we're using traditional techniques that I learned on my parents' farm in France," says cheesemaker Benoit Maillol. "The innovation is in using sheep's milk, which makes a more flavorful, creamier cheese."*

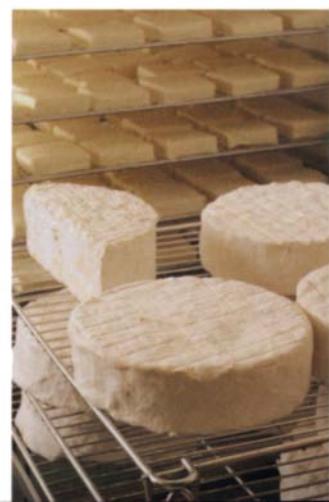
*As the cheese ripens, a thin layer of white mold forms a rind. Rounds of Shepherd's Wheel need a month to ripen, while smaller squares of Hudson Valley Camembert take two weeks.*



*Milk curds are fragile, so ladling by hand, instead of by machine, is a gentler way to transfer them to molds; this method preserves their smooth texture. Ladling is done in two passes, which makes for freer drainage, and ultimately, a creamier cheese.*



*The curds are drained of their whey overnight, and then they're given a brief soak in a salty brine bath, which flavors the cheese and helps control ripening. The cheese is still quite soft, so it's turned out onto plastic forms, which help the cheese keep its shape as it drains for another 24 hours.*



*After draining, the cheese dries on racks for two to three days. The racks are flipped every day to ensure the cheeses dry evenly. A cheese that's too watery won't ripen properly and has a shorter shelf life.*